

MISSOURI CATHOLIC CONFERENCE MESSENGER

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Veteran Educator Touts Tax Credit to Help School Children

If retired educator Barbara Swanson has her wish, on November 4, 2014, Missouri voters will consider amending the state constitution, creating a new tax credit that helps both public and nonpublic school children as well as children with disabilities.

"I just thought it was time to let voters consider something that would help all our school children," she said. Swanson grew up in the small town of Goodland, Kansas, on the far western plains. "There were no Catholic schools. We all attended the public schools and they did a fine job."

After graduating from Marymont, a Catholic women's college now closed, she began a 40 year career as an educator, teaching in both public and nonpublic schools and serving as the assistant Catholic school superintendent for the Diocese of Jefferson City. "I've experienced both public and nonpublic schools and there is good education going on in both systems," she said.

She recalls teaching in a small public school in Baldwin, Kansas, and later teaching in a much larger public school in Madison, Wis-

consin. In Madison the school was situated in a working class neighborhood not far from the Oscar Mayer Meat Packing Plant.

"I've never understood the hostility between some public and nonpublic schools. We are all trying to educate children and we need to work together," she said.

The Children's Education Initiative, which Swanson filed in mid-August with Missouri Secretary of State Jason Kander, is now certified for circulation to voters. The Missouri Catholic Conference is encouraging Catholics to sign the petition so voters can consider the proposal next November.

The proposal offers a state income tax credit when people donate to education foundations. The foundations in turn would provide help to school children.

Fifty percent of the funds raised would be allocated to public schools, 40% would fund scholarships for children to attend nonpublic schools, including Catholic schools, and 10% would enhance special education offered to children with disabilities.

levies," Swanson explained. "If you as a donor know you can claim a tax credit for 50% of the dollar amount of your donation, you may consider giving more to the foundation and that translates into more funds for the district."

As far as Catholic support goes, Swanson is confident it will be forthcoming. "Catholics already know about foundations like the Helias High School Foundation that offers scholarships to Catholic school children. This proposal will allow these foundations to raise more funds and offer more scholarships to children," she said.

"Through their taxes, parents support their public schools, but we need to continue to have a rich diversity of schooling in Missouri," Swanson said. "Not all kids do well in public schools and not all do well in nonpublic schools. That's why we need different options. Kids are not all the same."

Swanson recognizes that some of the official public school groups may oppose the tax credit she is proposing. "Hopefully, after realizing this is not a voucher, they will take a second look," she noted.

But Swanson is more concerned about getting the word out to school parents and grandparents, both public and nonpublic, so they can judge the proposal for themselves. "I think when they take a good look at this they'll support it."



Barbara Swanson



As much as \$180 million could be raised to boost K-12 schooling. "This is not your typical school choice proposal," Swanson explained. "There is a lot of help for nonpublic school children – up to \$72 million in scholarships - but the primary beneficiaries are the public schools."

"Many school districts already have private foundations that raise donations to supplement their tax

Today and Tomorrow Foundation Touches Lives in St. Louis

By Sharon Gerken

Chris, a freshman at Webster University and a computer science major, graduated from St. Mary's High School and attended St. Ann Elementary School. Vivian graduated from St. Cecilia School and Academy and is currently a freshman at Rosati Kain, where she is transitioning to the life of a high school student. Thanks to their scholarships, these Today and Tomorrow Educational Foundation (TTEF) alumni are fully developing their gifts and talents through the gift of education.

Today and Tomorrow has many success stories like these from both past and present. Since 1990, Today and Tomorrow has been committed to providing an exemplary education to the City of St. Louis' urban youth. Scholarships provide parents choices so their children can attend schools that best meet their needs. Our students are achieving and succeeding.

- 89% of TTEF alumni graduate high school.
- 71% of TTEF alumni are attending college this fall.
- 63% of the TTEF Class of 2013 are attending parochial or private high schools.

Empowering parents with educational choice creates opportunities and fulfills dreams for deserving children. We are proud of their accomplishments and eagerly anticipate the ones that 2014 brings! For the 2013 – 2014 school year Today and Tomorrow is providing assistance to approximately 920 urban students totaling \$1,536,400 to attend one of 36 nonpublic elementary schools in the city of St. Louis through our Help For Today – Hope For Tomorrow Scholarship Program.

The Today and Tomorrow Educational Foundation is presently the 4th largest private scholarship foundation in the country.

“Tower Grove Christian School is able to assist many families that do not have the financial means to attend a private school because of the Today and Tomorrow Educational Foundation,” said Mike Gregory, administrator of Tower Grove Christian School. “We are equipping students with the intellect and character to impact their family and community. Through the assistance of Today and Tomorrow, we are changing the landscape of



Chris, a St. Louis area student was able to attend St. Ann Elementary School and St. Mary's High School thanks to the Today and Tomorrow Educational Foundation.

this great city one child at a time.”

The parents of students Marcus and Jailyn P., said: “Without the scholarships we wouldn't be able to have our sons in such a fabulous school. They are being challenged in their learning and will be ready for high school.”

Sharon Gerken is the executive director of the Today and Tomorrow Educational Foundation.

“Assisting Parents in the Education of Their Children”

By Jeremy Lillig

Nestled in historic neighborhoods in Kansas City, the Strong City Schools, a program of the Bright Futures Fund of the Diocese of Kansas City - St. Joseph, meets a great need for the working poor who want their children to have a quality education. Parents who live in the Kansas City School District face a difficult situation. The school district is unaccredited and charter school performance is inconsistent.

What is a parent to do? How does a parent make an informed decision when they don't know how?

Our schools go beyond the bricks and mortar of classrooms to help parents in need. They assist parents in the education of their children. They give parents the comfort that their children are safe. They provide supportive communities where children can learn and parents can build networks that focus on the

needs of the children.

The safety of a school environment, especially that of a Catholic school in which God is present in the classroom, goes beyond the expectations that students will thrive only academically and includes the expectation that they will develop social skills as well. According to author Paul Tough, children in safe environments can develop non-cognitive coping skills that can then help them in all aspects of life and essentially help them to break the constraints of poverty.

The most important thing that our students receive is dignity. They are not “throw away kids.” Students in our dually-accredited Strong City Schools test on average 2.21 grades above grade level. This is due in part because they are seen as competent students that have great potential. The values of Catholic teaching are instilled in them so that they may share the grace of Christ with others. They learn to be responsible citizens in a

world in which the value of life is not seen as trivial and the path towards truth is counter cultural.

Notre Dame Law Professor Nicole Stelle Garnett summarized the power of urban Catholic Education quite simply: “demographics do not determine destiny.” The Strong City Schools do just that. Parents, no matter their economic plight, should be able to provide the best education possible for their children, especially if they desire to have their children educated in a Catholic environment.

Our students learn to follow the path of Jesus and to love their neighbor as themselves. We know the quality of our Catholic Schools, and the Children's Education Initiative will help to make sure that as many children as possible will be able to share in the fruitful gifts of this education.

Jeremy Lillig is the director of the Bright Futures Fund.

Take It To The People!

Initiative Petitions Give Citizens A Voice When Legislatures Fail To Act

Initiative petitions often arise when legislatures fail to act on popular ideas that citizens support. For years the Missouri General Assembly has refused to consider legislation that would take a fresh approach to K-12 education.

The Children's Education Initiative protects funding for K-12 public schools, but it also proposes some new ways to generate support for public schools as well as to offer scholarships to nonpublic school children.

Missouri is one of 24 states where citizens can enact laws directly through an initiative petition process. South Dakota was the first state to adopt the initiative petition in 1898, at the height of the Progressive era when reformers sought to make government more responsive to the people.

In most states, including Missouri, passing a law through an initiative petition is not easy. In Missouri, to get a proposed state constitutional amendment on the election ballot, 8% of the legal voters must sign a petition in six of the state's eight Congressional districts. (See Congressional Map)

As a general rule, it is easier to obtain signatures in heavily populated compact districts, such as the First and Second districts in the St. Louis metropolitan area. In contrast, big challenges face signature gatherers in the Sixth District, which stretches across Northern Missouri, and the Eighth District, which covers the central Ozarks and Southeastern Missouri.

Will the Children's Education Initiative be considered by voters at the November 4, 2014, election? That will depend on you, the voter, signing the official petition. More specifically, getting this proposal on the ballot will require an army of volunteers who are willing to go out to voters and collect those signatures.

In the coming weeks your parish will be asking for volunteers. Step forward and help. Together, Missouri citizens can change our state constitution to expand the K-12 educational opportunities available to all of our school children.



Number of signatures needed by Congressional District: 1st District, 27,603; 2nd District, 32,337; 3rd District, 28,109; 4th District, 26,030; 5th District, 26,726; 6th District, 27,087; 7th District, 25,944; 8th District, 24,398.

Why I am Signing the Petition A Special Education Perspective

As the director of the Special Learning Center in Jefferson City, I am always trying to find ways to better serve children, especially children with disabilities. The Children's Education Initiative opens up educational options so parents have more choices for



Debbie Hamler

their children.

At the Special Learning Center we believe in looking for ideas that can enhance special education services for children. I believe this tax credit will be a way to help all the children in our community. It is exciting to find a way to revitalize our community commitment to our local schools of all kinds. This will provide financial assistance to elementary and secondary school children in public and nonpublic settings. I believe this is a creative way to fund education and I support this initiative.

Will You Sign the Petition?

In the coming weeks someone with a clipboard and pen may approach you to support the Children's Education Initiative. Take a moment to listen to them. Yes, petitions are circulated all the time and many don't merit a second thought, but this one does.



Some believe our schools can only be "fixed" with help from Washington or Jefferson City.

The Children's Education Initiative, however, looks first to local people to address the challenges facing K-12 education.

The Initiative proposes a tax credit to help foundations raise money for local schools and school children. This is not a government handout but an invitation for local communities to step forward and improve their schools.

There are foundations that help schools now, but the Initiative can spur the establishment of new ones and help existing foundations to raise more funds. How does this come about? Well, consider how people make donations now.

When families sit down at the kitchen table to discuss money matters, they know they can only afford to give so much to charities. Maybe they normally give \$500 to an education foundation. But what if they can claim a tax credit for 50% of the dollar amount they give? Now that family can consider giving \$1000. The loss to their budget will be the same – \$500 – but the foundation gets double last year's donation.

Now multiply this doubling of donations by thousands of donors. The new tax credit will mean a foundation can raise many more dollars and help many more school children.

But it is not just about raising the money; it's about encouraging people to get more involved in improving their local schools. Foundations not only raise funds, they recruit volunteers for school projects and generally build support for local schools.

Why Should I Care?

My Parish Doesn't Have a Catholic School

Most Catholic children attend public schools, not Catholic schools. In small communities there may be a Catholic elementary school, but everybody attends the public high school. As Catholics we are called to promote the common good and this includes the education of all of our children.

Also keep in mind that in some states school districts have been consolidated and small towns have lost their public school. Missouri still has many smaller public school districts. The Children's Education Initiative will help

protect our smaller public schools.

And here is a final consideration. Right now the Missouri Constitution fails to recognize the contribution of private and parochial schools in educating Missouri's school children. Passage of the Children's Education Initiative will bring recognition and respect to all schools - public, nonpublic, Catholic, Lutheran, Baptist, etc., and all school children. That is a principle worth fighting for. Sign the petition and urge others to sign the petition.

Why I am Signing the Petition

A Public School Board Member

Martin Goedken, Conception Jct., MO.

I strongly support the Missouri Children's Education Initiative. As a former member of the Board of the South Nodaway School District (six years), I realize the financial challenges that a small school district can experience. I am thankful that there is strong local support for our school, as evidenced by very successful efforts to maintain and increase local funding for the school. However, a 50% tax credit program can be an additional and very beneficial financial avenue for the education of our children in this rural area.

In addition, the Missouri Children's Education Initiative will give parents and others the opportunity to assist, via scholarships, those who prefer to attend private schools, including Catholic schools. This can provide greater freedom for people to choose where they want their children to be educated. After all, parents (not the State) have the primary responsibility for the education of their children.

A Catholic Educator

I taught at Helias for 45 years and saw the many sacrifices parents made to provide a Catholic education for their children.

I truly believe that this tax credit bill will surely pass if it is put on the ballot. The passage of this Initiative would create opportunities for people and businesses alike to donate a greater amount of money to the Helias Foundation, which in turn would help families afford Catholic education by providing a scholarship fund. I hope you will consider supporting our campaign.



Ray Hentges



Campaign Committee Calls for Help

Missourians for Children's Education is the campaign committee that has been established to spearhead passage of the Children's Education Initiative. It is expensive to conduct any successful initiative petition campaign. If you would like to contribute, make your check payable to Missourians for Children's Education P.O. Box. 144, Jefferson City, MO, 65102. This contribution is not tax deductible.