

Good News

Bringing the light of Christ to Missouri.



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Coming To A Parish Near You

Bishops Urge Catholics to Support Children's Education Initiative

How many signatures will your parish collect? Right now the Missouri bishops are asking parishes to gather signatures from voters who support the Children's Education Initiative (CEI).

This proposed state constitutional amendment would provide assistance to all school children, including children attending public and nonpublic schools and children needing special educational services. If enough signatures are gathered, the proposal will be on the November 4, 2014 election ballot.

CEI proposes a state income tax credit when people donate to nonprofit education foundations. A person could claim a tax credit for 50% of the dollar amount of their

donation. If a donor gave \$1,000, he or she could claim a \$500 tax credit. The idea is to encourage more donations thereby allowing foundations to give more funds to local public schools and more scholarships to nonpublic school children.

Education foundations exist now. For example, the Archdiocese of St. Louis has the Today and Tomorrow Educational Foundation that awards scholarships to needy students. Some individual schools, such as Helias Catholic High School in Jefferson City, have foundations that provide financial help to school families. Many public school districts also have foundations to assist them in funding special projects, such as developing a new science or computer lab.



CEI will help existing foundations raise funds and it will spur communities and schools to establish new foundations. All of these foundations will be able to benefit from the proposed tax credit, which would be capped at \$90 million annually.

Foundations helping public schools would receive 50% of the funds, 40% would be reserved for nonpublic school children, including scholarships for children attending Catholic schools, and 10% would be allocated to enhance special education for

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children with disabilities.

The Missouri Catholic Conference (MCC) has sent a packet to parishes and Catholic schools that provides details on CEI and tips on how to gather signatures. The local councils of the

Knights of Columbus are also being asked to help.

Taking into account the normal error rate, between 220,000 and 280,000 signatures will have to be gathered statewide. That's a lot of signatures but with support from parishioners it

is a goal that can be reached.

For more information visit the MCC website:

www.MOcatholic.org

Meet Your Diocesan Coordinators

The bishops have tabbed a Diocesan Coordinator to assist parishes, field questions and provide training to parishioners who volunteer to gather signatures.

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How You Can Help

Would you like to help gather signatures in support of the Children's Education Initiative?

First, contact your pastor or your Catholic school principal. Secondly, if you need additional assistance, contact your Diocesan Coordinator or the MCC.

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.

Initiative Petitions: A Tool in the Toolbox of Democracy

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

Prior to the Progressive era, U.S. Senators were selected by state legislatures, and political machines with tight party discipline controlled big city governments, handpicking candidates for public office and providing patronage to loyal followers. The initiative petition, along with the direct election of U.S. Senators, the short ballot, referendum and recall, were all planks in the Progressive effort to give ordinary citizens more voice in their government.

Like any tool, the initiative petition process can be used well or misused. Today, some observers believe the original purpose of initiative petitions has been subverted because well-

funded special interests can mount expensive media campaigns that oversimplify or even distort the true facts, leading voters to hasty decisions that undermine the common good.

But the initiative petition can be a tool for good when special interests bottle up meritorious legislation in state legislatures. At times citizens have no recourse but to turn to an initiative petition in order to express their views and move good ideas forward.

For years the Missouri General Assembly has refused to enact legislation that would provide assistance to private and parochial school families. Even modest proposals to provide a tax deduction to parents for their children's educational expenses have been stymied.

There can be tendency, when rebuffed in this fashion, for initiative petitions to be put forward that offer simple but unworkable solutions to complex problems. At times an initiative peti-

tion process may provide a platform for airing grievances against special interests but the proposed initiative, if enacted, will actually do more harm than good.

The Children's Education Initiative is **not** this kind of initiative petition. The proposal does not set up public schools as the enemies of good education, as is sometimes argued by school reformers. In fact, 50% of the proposed tax credits are allocated for the improvement of programs in public schools.

Political strategists may complain the Children's Education Initiative is too complex, that it fails to establish an "us versus them" choice for voters. To these charges, proponents must plead guilty.

The proposal offers a thoughtful answer to a complex question: how do we re-ignite community involvement in local schools and encourage more cooperation between public and non-public schools? By enacting the Children's Education Initiative, voters affirm a truth too often forgotten, that good K-12 education starts at home and in local communities and 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 students attend 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, non-public, 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.

Committee Looks for Campaign Contributions

A secular campaign committee has been established - Missourians for Children's Education - to spearhead the effort to pass the Children's Education Initiative. Already, \$300,000 has been raised, but much more is needed. Contributions are welcome but are not tax deductible. Anyone interested should make their check payable to Missourians for Children's Education, P.O. Box 144, Jefferson City, Missouri 65102.

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A Community-based Approach to K-12 Education

The Children's Education Initiative (CEI) proposes a community-based approach to educating children. CEI does not impose requirements on schools. The proposal instead seeks to empower local people by giving them the financial tools to make their public schools better and to provide scholarships to children who learn best in nonpublic school settings.

The proposed tax credits are only given when people step forward and donate to nonprofit foundations. These foundations, in turn, use the new funds to better the K-12 schooling in the local community. Public schools decide how to use the money they receive and nonpublic school families decide which school to send their child to.

CEI assumes that local people will make good decisions and act in the best interest

of the children in their community. That's a lot better than having Washington or Jefferson City try to micro-manage what happens in our local schools.

