



## WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

**EYE ON THE CAPITOL**  
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**Parental Choice and Catholic Education: Reflecting on Wisconsin's Funding Increase**  
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At the beginning of the new year, it is important to pause and reflect on the events and blessings of the past year. And so we note that this past June, Wisconsin's four parental choice education programs received the largest increase in funding since the inception of the first program in 1990.

Wisconsin's Bishops have long supported school choice based on Catholic social teaching. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* addresses parents' fundamental rights, as the primary educators of their children, to "choose a school for them which corresponds to their own convictions" (CCC 2229). Although parents are the principal educators, they are not the only educators of their children (CCC 1653). Parents exercise their educational responsibility "in close and vigilant cooperation with civil and ecclesial agencies" (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* 240). At the same time, "public authorities have the duty of guaranteeing this parental right and of ensuring the concrete conditions for its exercise" (CCC 2229).

After decades of lobbying state government, Catholics can be proud that Wisconsin has partially recognized this parental right through its four state-funded school choice education programs: the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP), Racine Parental Choice Program (RPCP), Wisconsin Parental Choice Program (WPCP), and Special Needs Scholarship Program (SNSP).

All four choice programs also promote a preferential option for the poor, a key pillar of Catholic social teaching. Only families with an income less than 300 percent of the federal poverty level (\$90,000 for a family of four) are eligible for the Racine and Milwaukee programs, while the statewide program is 220 percent of the poverty level. And anyone, regardless of income, with a disability is eligible for the SNSP. That means students can attend schools they may not otherwise be able to afford.

The funding increase signed in June means that in fiscal year 2024, voucher amounts will increase for students in grades K-8 voucher from the current \$8,399 to \$9,893 (+\$1,494); choice students in grades 9-12 from \$9,045 to \$12,387 (+\$3,342); and Special Needs Scholarship Program students from \$13,076 to \$15,065 (+\$1,989). The following fiscal year, all voucher categories will increase by another \$344.

Across the state, Catholic and non-Catholic parents entrust over 50,000 students to Wisconsin's 275+ Catholic schools. This expansion of funds into the parental choice programs will help Catholic schools with vouchers better support and educate the next generation.

January 28 to February 3 is Catholic Schools Week in the State of Wisconsin. Governor Evers has issued a proclamation recognizing that Catholic schools “offer religious-based education to thousands of students annually, providing a learning environment that emphasizes the formation of Catholic values and a commitment to community service.”

So, as we celebrate Catholic Schools Week, let us give thanks to the numerous teachers, staff, administrators, and benefactors who help provide this education for our students. Let us give thanks to the lawmakers for helping give all students across the state an opportunity to pursue an education that will help them thrive.

Quality education is the surest path to full participation in the social, economic, and political life of our nation. Increasing opportunities for students to succeed, whether in public, private, or home school, is our responsibility to the next generation. Let us continue to find ways to work together to make sure Wisconsin children receive the best possible education.

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The Wisconsin Catholic Conference (WCC) is the public policy voice of the Bishops of Wisconsin and also exists to bring the Church’s social teachings to parishes. To schedule a speaker, sign up for updates, or for more information about the WCC’s advocacy efforts, visit our website at [www.wisconsinatholic.org](http://www.wisconsinatholic.org).