



Preserving Catholic Schools

Issue

Accessibility to Catholic Schools and Equity for All School Children

BACKGROUND

Catholic schools are facing an economic crisis. A significant number of our schools have been forced to close and the solvency of others is increasingly threatened as fewer families are able to afford the dual burden of taxes and tuition. The resulting cost of having to educate more children in public schools only exacerbates the financial crisis with which lawmakers are grappling. Our efforts of keeping Catholic schools affordable are being aggravated by the failure of state lawmakers and agency officials to reimburse religious and independent schools for 100 percent of the costs they incur in complying with state mandates and participating in state programs – seemingly in direct violation to the 35-year-old Mandated Services Reimbursement statute. Specifically:

1. Two years of expenses for complying with the Comprehensive Attendance Policy (CAP) have been ignored;
2. An error by the State Education Department, costing schools an initial \$15 million, continues to go uncorrected;
3. The state's obligation of 100 percent reimbursement was renounced in the 2008-09 state fiscal year, making those cuts permanent rather than temporary, and there are continued attempts to abandon the principle of full reimbursement; and
4. The MTA payroll tax is costing religious and independent schools some \$6 million, while public schools are entitled to reimbursement of their MTA tax costs.

As a result, a total of \$243 million is owed to religious and independent schools – that amounts to \$500 for every student. We urge lawmakers to uphold their commitment to fully reimburse Catholic schools for their mandated expenses and to provide parents, especially poorer parents, with a meaningful education tax credit to help them offset the tremendous burden of rising taxes and tuition.

MESSAGE POINTS

- Because of lawmakers' actions, our schools are forced to raise tuition and/or reduce services to students, neither of which parents deserve or will tolerate.
- Catholic and other religious and independent schools educate 500,000 children, save New York's taxpayers \$8.5 billion each year, and are an integral part of New York's economy.
- Education Tax Credits would help relieve pressure on the state budget and actually produce a saving to taxpayers by helping parents afford religious and independent schools.
- Billions of dollars of aid is devoted to public schools. The parents of children in religious and independent schools deserve a fair share of government support.

Church Teaching

“No child should be denied his or her right to an education in faith, which in turn nurtures the soul of a nation.”

—Pope Benedict XVI to Catholic educators, Washington, D.C., April 17, 2008