



YOU CAN'T STOP PROGRESS:

Iowa enacts new tuition tax-credit program

BY DEBORAH GREIVELDINGER

Courtesy of the Greater Des Moines Convention and Visitors Bureau

Scott County, Iowa, would not be viewed by most as a hotbed for school choice advocacy, but efforts by members of this community played an instrumental part in the tax-credit scholarship bill passed into Iowa law in June.

Davenport and Bettendorf, both located in Scott County, are two of the Quad Cities that line the Mississippi River in eastern Iowa.

For the past 150 years, Catholic schools have been an important part of the Quad Cities that community members appreciate and celebrate part of the blend of public, non-public and faith-based K-12

schools as a whole have experienced enrollment decline in recent years, nonpublic enrollment has declined at a faster rate.

Many speculated about the causes of declining enrollment, including the decline in Catholic family size that surpasses the aggregate decline in Iowa family size, as well as rising tuition costs. About half of the Catholic children in the community attend Catholic schools. In 2004, the Assumption Foundation, named after the Catholic high school in Davenport, embarked on a strategic-planning process to set the course for the high school's future. That process identified a keen tuition assistance need among many Catholic families, and eventually led to a funding initiative that would change the long-term outlook for all of the area's Catholic schools.

The foundation, now renamed the Assumption Foundation for K-12 Schools, began a funding campaign to meet the tuition-assistance needs of all families interested in sending their children to Assumption High School or any of its four feeder schools in Davenport and Bettendorf (All Saints Catholic, John F. Kennedy, Our Lady of Lourdes and St. Paul the Apostle).

The funding campaign, called Embracing Our Future, has received generous support from hundreds of members of the Catholic community.

In 2005, the Assumption Foundation implemented a

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-Linda Duffy

schools that are available to meet the needs of children within the community. However, in recent years enrollment in local Catholic schools has declined in the same way it has in many private schools across the country. While Iowa

family tuition plan that evaluates family income and size in relationship to total K-12 tuition requirements. According to Linda Duffy, president of Assumption High School, 319 of Scott County's 1,752 Catholic school students qualified for more than \$425,000 in tuition assistance in the program's first year. According to Duffy, "Obviously, those 319 students were at risk of leaving the Catholic school system. Their families could feel their choices slipping away."

For the first time in many years, enrollment in Scott County's Catholic elementary schools showed a slight increase last year a trend the Assumption foundation believes will spill over into the high school in years to come.

At the same time the Foundation began its funding campaign, board members began to seek ways to advocate for long-term solutions to the issue of educational choice in Iowa.

Finding no state association of its type, Assumption Foundation board member Tom Daniel organized the Non-Public School Parents Association, which became a pipeline for information promoting school choice in Iowa, particularly among Scott County Catholic school families.

The Iowa Catholic Conference, headquartered in Des Moines, picked up on the interest from the state's eastern border and arranged for a meeting to collaborate efforts. The ICC also represents the interests of Lutheran and Christian schools across Iowa.

The ICC persuaded legislators to introduce tuition-assistance legislation in Spring 2004. The bill, modeled after Arizona's scholarship bill, was supported by nonpublic school boosters. Bettendorf's Jack Bush made a trip to Des Moines to visit with legislators and to mention his 30 grandchildren who have or currently attend Catholic schools. The 2004 bill easily passed both houses of the legislature, but was vetoed by Gov. Tom Vilsack.

According to Duffy, "Every cloud has a silver lining.

School choice boosters from across Iowa were encouraged by the 2004 support within the legislature." Choice advocates redoubled their efforts and in 2005, and the Non-public School Parents Association merged with the newly formed Iowa Alliance for Choice in Education to unify the advocacy efforts.

In 2006 another school choice bill won strong support from legislators. The Educational Opportunities Act offered a 65 percent direct tax credit against Iowa income taxes. While no individual credit caps were in place, the total state caps allowed were \$2.5 million in 2006 and \$5 million in 2007 and beyond. Credits were to be issued by Student Tuition Organizations, which are authorized to issue credits proportionate to their represented student enrollment. The bill passed the House and the Senate 49-1. Gov. Vilsack signed the bill into law.

In Scott County Catholic schools alone, more than \$350,000 in gifts should qualify for the new tax credits in 2007. Assumption Foundation President Ed Carroll and Vice President Barb Johnson, agree that, although the new tax credit will not meet all of the need of Scott County Catholic school students, it will be instrumental in meeting the foundation's tuition assistance objectives. ■

PART OF THE IOWA TEAM



Members of the Assumption Foundation for K-12 Schools: honorary member, Jack Bush; Assumption president, Linda Duffy; board treasurer, Tom Daniel; board vice-president, Barbara Johnson, and board president, Ed Carroll.

DEMOCRATIC GUBERNATORIAL SUPPORT



Gov. Janet Napolitano (D)

Earlier this year, Gov. Napolitano allowed a corporate tax credit to become law without her signature. In June, she signed the state's budget bill, which created two new voucher programs and expanded the corporate tax credit.



Gov. Ed Rendell (D)

This July, Gov. Rendell signed the state's budget bill, which expanded Pennsylvania's Educational Improvement Tax Credit program by \$10 million. The program now has a cap of \$54 million, with nearly \$36 million going toward



Gov. Jim Doyle (D)

In March, after three years of resistance, Gov. Doyle finally signed legislation lifting the cap on the Milwaukee program. The bill increased the number of children allowed to receive a voucher by more than 7,000 seats.



Gov. Tom Vilsack (D)

This June, Gov. Vilsack signed the tax-credit scholarship bill. This allows income tax credits for contributions made to school tuition organizations.