



December 2018

Dear Catholic School Families,

We are excited to share the following important information on how to apply for tax credit scholarships for the 2019/20 school year.

Through the "Invest in Kids Act," tax credit scholarships are available to Illinois children, in grades K-12, from low-income households who want to attend private schools, including our 209 Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Chicago. This program started during the 2018/19 school year and many families in our Catholic schools are benefiting. The scholarships are funded by donors who receive a 75 percent credit on their Illinois state income tax as a result of their donation. The scholarships offered through the program could cover up to 100 percent of tuition and eligible fees for one year and they are awarded on a first come, first served basis. **If you received a tax credit scholarship this year (2018/19 school year), you must reapply for a tax credit scholarship for next year (2019/20 school year).**

You need to apply for tax credit scholarships through a scholarship granting organization (SGO), which distributes the scholarships. The Archdiocese of Chicago is working with two SGOs: Empower Illinois and Big Shoulders Fund SGO.

Eligibility

K-12 students with limited financial resources and income up to 300 percent of the federal poverty level, are eligible to receive tax credit scholarships. Returning tax credit scholarship recipients, can make up to 400 percent of the federal poverty level. Before April 1, 2019, priority will be given to students from each of the following categories:

- Members of a household whose previous' year's total annual income does not exceed 185 percent of the federal poverty level (\$46,435 for a family of four); OR
- Reside within a focus district* OR
- Received a scholarship from a scholarship granting organization during the previous school year; OR
- Siblings of a current scholarship recipient.

After April 1, 2019, all other qualifying students will be considered for scholarships, subject to availability of funds.

**Focus districts are public school districts that have a school where at least one subgroup of students performs in the bottom 10 percent statewide or a graduation rate of less than 60 percent.*

What You Need to Apply

You need proof of Illinois residency and your adjusted gross income to apply for tax credit scholarships. Choose your most recent household and income documents from the same year to use throughout your application.

Proof of Illinois Residence (**one** of the following for the household):

- Illinois driver's license with current address
- Illinois identification card (issued by the Secretary of State) with current address
- Utility bill with name and current address



- Statement of benefits from WIC or SNAP with name and current address
- W-2 or 1099 with name and current address
- Residential lease (current address) in the parent's name
- Federal Form 1040 with name and current address

Adjusted Gross Income (one of the following for the household):

- Federal tax return, pages 1 and 2**
- W-2
- 1099(s)
- Year-end pay stub
- Letter, on company letterhead, from employer(s) indicating cash wages paid.

**If your federal tax return is not available to you and you receive WIC or SNAP benefits, you may submit your statement of WIC and SNAP benefits.

Valid Email Address (e.g. Gmail, Hotmail, AOL, etc.)

Empower Illinois Application Process and Key Dates

The Empower Illinois tax credit scholarship application is a two-step process:

Step 1: On Tuesday, January 15, 2019 at 7 p.m., you will complete a brief reservation form on Empower Illinois' website – EmpowerIllinois.org – that timestamps your reservation. **This is a critical step as your timestamp matters and may impact your chances of receiving a scholarship. You will want to complete this form right at 7 p.m. Minutes matter.**

The reservation form will ask you for the following information:

- Parent name
- Contact information – address, phone number, email address
- Child(ren) name(s)***

***Please note: All children you would like to apply for need to be listed on the reservation form. If you do not add a child on the initial reservation but you would like to apply for a tax credit scholarship for that child, you will be required to complete a second reservation and any additional children will receive a separate (later) time stamp.

Step 2: Beginning on or about Friday, January 18, 2019, you may complete the full scholarship application through the Empower Illinois online student portal. You will receive instructions via email about setting up your student portal after your reservation has been completed (step 1). Empower Illinois will begin awarding scholarships on Monday, January 28, 2019. Scholarship awards are subject to the availability of funds at your school of choice. We recommend you submit your application **before Monday, January 28** to increase your chances of receiving a scholarship.

Please note: The Empower Illinois application will be available in English, Spanish and Polish.

For more information, visit EmpowerIllinois.org.

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Big Shoulders Fund Application Process and Key Date

The Big Shoulders Fund SGO will follow a similar application process as its' process last year. It will be a one-step process, which will open on **Tuesday, January 22 at 8 a.m.**

Please note: The Big Shoulders Fund SGO application will be available in English and Spanish.

For more information, visit bigshouldersfundsgo.org.

Blessings to you and your family this holiday season!

Yours in Christ,

Jim Rigg, Ph.D.
Superintendent of Catholic Schools
Archdiocese of Chicago