



2017 National School Choice Week Statement from Adrienne Runnebaum, CEF Director of Tax Credits

Since 1997, the Catholic Education Foundation (CEF) has provided scholarships to children in need. CEF currently supports 21 Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas. We work every day to make a high-quality, faith-filled education possible, knowing that education is key to breaking the familial cycle of poverty.

CEF became a registered Scholarship Granting Organization (SGO) in January 2015 for the *Kansas Tax Credit for Low-Income Students Scholarship program*. This is a second piece of scholarship business for CEF and is separate from our traditional program. Becoming an SGO has allowed us to further expand our mission and commitment to serving underprivileged students. We're currently providing scholarships to 188 students at 14 Archdiocesan Catholic Schools under the Tax Credit Scholarship program. Many of these schools are nestled in our urban communities, providing a much needed resource. While we're excited about our initial success, we have over 100 students on the waitlist and we anticipate this number will continue to increase. There is obviously more work to be done to provide a school choice opportunity.

In today's world, we have a plethora of choices—from the food we eat to the brands we purchase. A child's education is a critical choice for parents and it sets the stage for their future success. However, far too often, a family's financial situation or their zip code creates a barrier for a parent to make that decision. A parent should have the freedom to explore the educational options that best fits their child's specific needs, regardless of their economic situation. *It comes down to a simple yet profound question—what is in the best interest of the student?*

Our CEF families come from diverse backgrounds and some are facing significant challenges. However, these students continue to overcome these obstacles through their perseverance, tenacity and the support of their families, schools and communities. Our families do not intend to take this opportunity for granted—they themselves have also made sacrifices of their own time, talent and treasure for their child's education and future.

I've sat across from single parents with young children who expressed their humble gratitude for this program. They spoke about the profound difference it's made in the lives of her children. They have watched their children flourish and grow in an environment that's best for their learning needs.

I've heard from parents and family members who simply want more for their own children than they had—a high school diploma, post-secondary education or the chance to pursue their personal and professional aspirations.

Principals tell me about the tears of joy that are shed in their offices when they share the good news about a child's scholarship award.

I've read letters from students describing their excitement and gratitude for this scholarship. They have hopes and dreams not only for their own future but also the future of their families. Many of these students have younger brothers and sisters who look up to them as their role models. They want to show their siblings that they too can achieve great things, despite their hardships.

I could share many more inspiring stories like these from our CEF students, families and principals. Ultimately, we want all Kansas students to succeed whether their parents choose a public school, private school, homeschooling, or some other learning environment. We want all students to flourish, to become vibrant, active citizens in our communities and in our state. They will make this world a better place by fully utilizing their individual gifts and talents.

We've experienced first-hand the positive and personal impact this program is making in the lives of our CEF students. Our families would be devastated if they lost this scholarship opportunity. We look forward to our continued work in this initiative, in partnership with our Catholic schools and our generous donors. *We will continue to make this educational dream a reality—one family, one student, one scholarship at a time.*