

Hello parents and guardians!

My name is Jennifer Capasso and I will be St. Bartholomew school's political representative for the 2011-2012 school year. My husband, Jeffrey, and I have 2 daughters attending St. Bart's. Carmela is in first grade and Emilia is in pre-K. I am sure, just like us, all of you are busy juggling home, work, school and other obligations. My job as the political representative will be to forward any political information pertinent to education. I will try to include a brief overview of information in the emails. You can read any attachments at your leisure.

Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) program, allows local companies to support local non-profit charities (such as St. Bart's school), with tax dollars they would be sending to Harrisburg. If you or anyone you know has a business in Penn Hills, this could be a great way to help out our school. Plus the business has a chance to know exactly where their tax dollars are going.

This week Governor Tom Corbett outlined his agenda for education reform in Pennsylvania. The four proposals include: opportunity scholarships, EITC, charter schools and educator evaluations. Charter schools and educator evaluations does not apply to St. Bart's. The Diocese requires thier own yearly evaluations for all of their teachers.

### **Opportunity Scholarships:**

- An Opportunity Scholarship Program, which would provide tuition assistance for eligible students to attend a public or non-public school of their choice.
- Eligibility for scholarships would be based on income and residence within the attendance zones of the lowest-performing 5 percent of schools across the state.
- By focusing on the worst-performing schools and children in the most at-risk situations, this proposal sends tax dollars to where they can have the greatest impact.
- The proposal ensures accountability by requiring opportunity scholarship recipients to take an assessment to measure academic achievement. The Department of Education will administer the program, including verifying student eligibility and processing of payments.
- Should a child leave their school district to attend another school, the state dollars will "follow" the child.

**The Educational Improvement Tax Credit:**

- An increase to the EITC to provide greater educational opportunities to eligible students from low- and middle-income families beyond the nearly 40,000 students served each year.
- The increased EITC will also provide additional funding to educational improvement organizations that can potentially provide benefits to all schools.
- Program reforms will be proposed along with the increased tax credit.

Contacting your senator and local representatives would be a great way to voice your support of EITC and voucher program. Please see attachments with form letters you can use to contact your representatives. The Diocese is also requesting for a few parents from each Catholic school to meet with representatives. There will be info in the near future on a trip scheduled to Harrisburg. I will forward that information as soon as it is available to me for anyone interested in going to Harrisburg. I've included the letter from the Diocese sent to Mrs. Pricer regarding parent/guardian support.

Thanks for taking the time to review the above information. I look forward to updating all of you again.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Capasso

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This document contains:

I. LETTERS/EMAILS FOR PRINCIPALS

II. LETTER/EMAIL FOR TEACHERS

III. LETTERS/EMAILS FOR PARENTS

IV. LETTER/EMAIL FOR HOME AND SCHOOL BOARDS

I. LETTERS/EMAILS FOR PRINCIPALS

**CALLING ALL TEACHERS:** Voice your support for school choice. Make a difference for Pennsylvania's future.

School choice legislation that would include vouchers and an increase to the widely successful Educational Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) program is up for debate in Harrisburg. Involvement of parents, educators, Catholic school alumni, parishioners, and all citizens and taxpayers will be critical to the success of school choice. Read more about the issue at [www.pacatholic.org/schoolchoice](http://www.pacatholic.org/schoolchoice).

Our strong support of parental choice in education does not mean that Catholic educators are opposed to public education. We recognize that a majority of America's children are educated in public schools, and we respect the professional competence and commitment of our public school colleagues. But we believe that full and fair parental choice will strengthen both families and schools, and improve educational opportunities for all.

Join the Pennsylvania Catholic Advocacy Network and the Advocates for Catholic Education in PA by sending a message to your state lawmakers. Encourage your coworkers, friends, family, neighbors and others to do the same.

Urge the PA General Assembly to pass school choice now by clicking here to send a message!

**CALLING ALL CATHOLIC SCHOOL PARENTS:** Voice your support for school choice. Make a difference for Pennsylvania's future.

School choice legislation that would include vouchers and an increase to the widely successful Educational Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) program is up for debate in Harrisburg. . Involvement of parents, educators, Catholic school alumni, parishioners, and all citizens and taxpayers will be critical to the success of school choice. (Read more about the issue at [www.pacatholic.org/schoolchoice](http://www.pacatholic.org/schoolchoice))

Join the Pennsylvania Catholic Advocacy Network and the Advocates for Catholic Education in PA by sending an email message to your state lawmakers. Or visit, call or write to them in their district or Harrisburg offices. Tell your story about what educational choice means to you and your child. Encourage fellow school parents, friends, family, neighbors and others to do the same.

Urge the PA General Assembly to pass school choice now by sending a message to your legislator!

## II. LETTER/EMAIL FOR TEACHERS

Dear ,

As a teacher, your constituent and a concerned citizen, I strongly support school choice. It is the right choice for Pennsylvania's future.

Please vote YES on legislation that would increase the successful EITC program and create a voucher program.

As a teacher, I know that every student learns in a different way. School choice allows parents to choose the best educational option for their child.

As your constituent, I expect you to vote for school choice when it comes before the legislature.

## III. LETTERS/EMAILS FOR PARENTS

Letter 1: Competition Dear ,

I live relatively close to three gas stations. One of them sits alone on a busy road and the gas is always the most expensive. The other two are right across the street from one another on a similarly busy road, and the cost of gas at those two stations is usually much cheaper. These gas stations are all within a few miles of each other, but one thing keeps the cost down at the two that sit across the street from each other: competition.

The average public school spends \$13,907 per student each year. The average tuition at a non-public school is between \$3,500 and \$6,500. Because non-public schools have been competing for students since their inception, they have found more efficient and effective ways to provide academically excellent education for less money.

Pennsylvania public schools have had ample opportunities - and plenty of money - to improve their academic results and offer safe, nurturing environments for our children. Waiting any longer is detrimental to our children. It is time that we give all parents other educational options for their children. I bet that the same concept that keeps gas prices down in my neighborhood – competition - will ultimately improve our public school system as well.

Please support school choice legislation that offers BOTH an increase in EITC funds AND a voucher program. As your constituent, I expect you to vote for school choice when it comes before the legislature.

Letter 2: Cost to the State Dear ,

The constant refrain being sung by the opposition to school choice is that of a supposed crippling increase in spending. While an increase in spending frightens most Pennsylvanians as we continue to tighten our family budgets and worry about the spending of our government, there is one major flaw in the argument: it is not true.

Schools, just like other organizations, are cutting their costs and improving efficiency. In the past eight years, state educational spending has increased by 40%, to \$26 billion per year, and yet student achievement remains stagnant. The average public school spends \$13,907 per student each year. The average tuition at a non-public school is between \$3,500 and \$6,500. Vouchers will not exceed the tuition cost at the school and the difference will even be returned the state, which we all know could benefit from those funds.

Pennsylvania should make academically excellent schools available and affordable to families who are only trying act in the best interest of their children. We need to shift the focus of this conversation from what is best for the bureaucracy of the school districts to what is best for our children, and, ultimately, our future.

Please support school choice legislation that offers BOTH an increase in EITC funds AND a voucher program. As your constituent, I expect you to vote for school choice when it comes before the legislature.

Letter 3: Leave Partisanship out of the debate Dear ,

When discussing the education of our children, who are our most precious resource and the best chance we have for correcting so many of the ills in society, adults need to leave the politics at the door of the capitol building. This is simply an issue of what is best for children and for their parents. Even though public school spending has increased 40% in the past eight years, we aren't seeing any positive return for that money. Test scores, parent satisfaction and student graduation rates are not increasing. It is time to arm parents with the ultimate educational weapon: the choice of the best institution for their child.

Please support school choice legislation that offers BOTH an increase in EITC funds AND a voucher program. As your constituent, I expect you to vote for school choice when it comes before the legislature.

Letter 4: Parents are primary educators Dear ,

As a parent, I understood my daughter's learning style and taught her so many basic skills: how to eat with a fork and spoon, how to recite her ABCs, how to tie her shoes. Those moments of learning and discovery are my most cherished as a parent. As parents, we are, quite simply, the first and primary educators of our children.

As our children age, we take on more colleagues in the work of education –babysitters, day care workers and, most importantly, teachers. Teachers are vitally important to my daughter's development as a student and as a member of community; teachers impart knowledge that I don't have or that I've long forgotten. They offer guidance and measure success. However, I remain the CEO of my daughter's education. And yet, when the public schools are failing my child, offering little to no improvement for her academically, I have nowhere to turn.

Senate Bill 1 puts me back in charge of my daughter's education, just as I should be. It gives me the chance to be selective, instead of resigning myself to send her to the only school I can afford. Please support school choice so that parents can become the CEOs of their children's education and development.

Please support school choice legislation that offers BOTH an increase in EITC funds AND a voucher program. As your constituent, I expect you to vote for school choice when it comes before the legislature.

## Letter 5: General Message

Dear ,

As your constituent and concerned citizen, I strongly support school choice.

Providing a quality education for our children is the most critical investment we can make for our future. Parents have the duty and responsibility to provide the best education possible for their children. They have a right to determine which school will best meet the needs of their children. The state should support parents in meeting this obligation.

I would like you to support legislation that increases the successful EITC program and creates a voucher program. Vouchers may or may not help me today, but they will help low-income families and will free up EITC funds that can assist both low- and middle- income families now.

School choice is not a public vs. private school issue; just as public schools have continued to receive funding while EITC has grown, so too will they receive funding when vouchers are passed. Rather, school choice empowers families to find the best educational environment for their student.

As your constituent, I am asking you to pass school choice legislation that contains vouchers and an increase to EITC.

On behalf of my family and all of Pennsylvania's students and parents, thank you for supporting school choice. As your constituent, I expect you to vote for school choice when it comes before the legislature.

## IV. LETTER/EMAIL FOR HOME AND SCHOOL BOARDS

Dear ,

We, as your constituents and members of the Home and School Board for \_\_\_\_\_ school, are writing in support of school choice.

Providing a quality education for our children is the most critical investment we can make for our future and parents have the duty and responsibility to provide the best education possible for their children. Financial realities often preclude parents from having that choice. Parents who pay their school taxes deserve some benefit from those taxes, in the form of some assistance in the exercise of their right to choose a nonpublic school, if that is best for their children; and

Non-public schools (such as \_\_\_\_\_) provide an excellent education, often for a fraction of the cost of educating the same student in a public school. Non-public schools already save tax dollars. If every nonpublic school student returned to public school, the costs would be unbearable. By allowing some students to be educated in less costly nonpublic schools, school choice will offset the need for future tax increases or state budget cuts; and

The Home and School Board of \_\_\_\_\_ supports school choice legislation that includes a voucher program and an increase to the Educational Improvement Tax Credit. By offering scholarships for both public-to-public and public-to-private school choice, qualified families could access a number of educational options, giving them the opportunity to choose a school that they determine is best for their child.

As your constituents, we expect you to vote for school choice – an increase in EITC and a voucher program - when it comes before the legislature.