



Committee on Catholic Education

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August 28, 2020

The Honorable Joaquin Castro
Chairman
Congressional Hispanic Caucus
2241 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Castro,

As you are certainly aware, the devastating economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have reached nearly every sector of American society. The Catholic schools in the United States have been severely impacted as well, and their centuries-long tradition of serving families from all walks of life is now imperiled. As the impact of the novel coronavirus has disproportionately affected America's minority communities, the same is true for our Catholic schools that serve predominately minority and Hispanic communities, and we are imploring your help for these families who have sought a Catholic education for their children.

Catholic schools are facing a crisis at this very moment. Over one hundred forty schools have already announced permanent closure, including schools in Chicago, Philadelphia, Houston, New Jersey, and New York. These closures disproportionately impact low-income and minority black and Hispanic children that are educated in urban schools. A recent survey of Catholic school principals showed that currently 10% are uncertain about their ability to open in the fall; this equals over 500 Catholic schools and thousands of families in turmoil. Strong action from Congress could provide these families and schools the confidence they need to stay in the Catholic school of their choice.

Catholic education has played a significant role in lifting many from poverty to a more hopeful future. Research shows Catholic schools close the achievement gap in low-income neighborhoods. The poorer and more at-risk a student is, the greater the relative achievement gains in Catholic schools.¹ A black or Latino child is 42% more likely to graduate from high school and two-and-a-half times more likely to graduate from college if he or she attends a Catholic school.²

Catholic schools bring cohesion to communities and increase family involvement in schools. Inner-city Catholic school parents report taking an active role in their children's education, and they believe that participating in the Catholic school community presents an

¹ Jacqueline Jordan. Irvine and Foster Michèle, in *Growing up African American in Catholic Schools* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1996).

² [Neal, Derek. "The Effects of Catholic Secondary Schooling on Educational Achievement." *Journal of Labor Economics* 15, no. 1 \(1997\): 108. Accessed July 16, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/2535316.](https://www.jstor.org/stable/2535316)

opportunity to break the cycle of poverty. Latino parents believe their children are more motivated and focused since enrolling in a Catholic school, and parents report their children work harder in their academic studies.³ One study suggests that following the closure of a Catholic elementary school, the local neighborhood's social cohesion decreases and disorder increases.⁴

For over 200 years, Catholic schools have prioritized serving the marginalized in our country. This important work continues across the country today, and we wish to highlight a few examples:

- The **Archdiocese of Los Angeles** is the largest Catholic school system in the United States. The diocese serves close to 74,000 students in 265 schools grades pre-kindergarten through twelve. 60% of schools are inner city/urban. 90% of eligible students participate in free/reduced lunch. 78% are under-represented minorities and 1 of 6 students are non-Catholic.
- In the **Archdiocese of New York**, 91% of students enrolled at inner-city Catholic schools are minorities. 73% of the students come from homes living at or below the federal poverty line.
- The **Archdiocese of Miami** serves over 33,000 students with 67% of the population Hispanic.
- Three quarters of the 36 Catholic schools in the **Diocese of Phoenix** are located in the inner city or urban areas with 63% of the elementary population being minority (Hispanic, African American, and Native American) and 49 % minority in high schools.
- The **Archdiocese of Detroit** serves over 1,500 low income students in primary and secondary schools in City of Detroit. The students are 70% African American and 20% Latino.
- The 49 schools in the **NativityMiguel** Coalition, located in 17 states, the District of Columbia, and two Canadian Provinces educate nearly 3,500 low income students free, or near free, of tuition with 48% of students identifying as Latino and 37% African American.
- **Partnership Schools**, a network of nine Catholic schools in Harlem and the South Bronx in New York and in Cleveland. Enrollees at these nine schools are 67 percent Hispanic and 31 percent African American. Of these students, 85 percent have received scholarships.
- **The Cristo Rey Network®** is comprised of 37 Catholic, career focused, college preparatory schools that today serve 12,000 students across 24 states and collectively claim 18,000 graduates. The Cristo Rey Network delivers a powerful and innovative approach to inner-city education that equips students exclusively from families of limited

³ Thomas Stewart, Ph.D. Patrick Wolf, Ph.D. Stephen Q. Cornman, Esq., MPA Kenann McKenzie-Thompson, M.Ed. Jonathan Butcher. (2009). Family Reflections on the District of Columbia Opportunity Scholarship Program Final Summary Report. University of Arkansas. Available at <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED508626.pdf>.

⁴ Friedlander Brinig, Margaret and Garnett, Nicole Stelle, Catholic Schools, Urban Neighborhoods, and Education Reform (March 31, 2010). Notre Dame Law Review, Vol. 85, No. 3, 2010, Notre Dame Legal Studies Paper No. 09-16, Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1395676> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1395676>.

economic means with the knowledge, character, and skills to transform their lives. 64% of Cristo Rey students are Hispanic/Latino and 28% are African American.

We understand the public school community has requested another \$300 billion in the next Coronavirus aid package. We ask that families of non-public schools be considered as a part of the comprehensive needs of K12 education, since non-public students represent ten percent of the K12 student population. Therefore, 10% of what is made available to public schools should be directed specifically to the non-public school community to provide **direct aid to families** in the form of means-tested scholarships.

Minority families, and especially Hispanic families, with children attending Catholic schools are counting on you, as are families with children in public school. **Please do not leave them behind** just because they value the historical and time-tested benefit of our Catholic schools for their children.

Please be assured of our willingness to work with your office in efforts to realize these critical policy initiatives for families. Thank you for your service to the nation, especially during these difficult times.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Barber S.J." with a small cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Michael C. Barber, SJ
Bishop of Oakland
Chairman, Committee on Catholic
Education

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Arturo Cepeda" with a small cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Arturo Cepeda
Auxiliary Bishop of Detroit
Chairman, Subcommittee on Hispanic
Affairs