



Parents Alliance for Catholic Education
PACE

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Media Release

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Office of Child Care Services Delivers Favorable Opinion on Voucher Use at Catholic Schools

Boston—The Parents Alliance for Catholic Education (PACE) today announced that the Massachusetts Office of Child Care Services (OCCS) has issued a legal opinion opening the way for voucher-eligible parents to select Catholic schools to provide their preschool (children ages 3-5) and after-school (children ages 5-12) child care services.

Previously, only child care programs licensed by OCCS could provide these services. OCCS does not license private schools that are not primarily for preschool children or those that limit after school care to children in the school's elementary grades.

To qualify for financial assistance in paying for preschool or after-school child care, a family must apply directly to their local Child Care Resource and Referral Agency. Today's announcement benefits those families who are eligible for financial assistance and seek the services of a Catholic school to provide their child care needs.

A legal review of this matter was initiated at the behest of PACE.

"Catholic schools in Massachusetts are providing stimulating and nurturing preschool and after-school child-care services to thousands of children of working families," said Steve Perla, Executive Director, PACE.

"The OCCS decision enables income-eligible families, for the first time, to use vouchers for child-care services at a Catholic school," Mr. Perla added.

Additionally, as long as families are made aware that a child-care program may contain religious elements, Catholic school providers are permitted to offer religious instruction. Catholic providers accepting OCCS vouchers cannot discriminate by law against students, families or employees on the basis of religion and other factors, such as race, age, national origin, marital status, disability, and other categories. Non-discrimination is consistent with the Catholic values of social justice and equity.

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Safe, affordable child-care services are in chronic demand in Massachusetts. The OCCS decision provides more choice and opportunity to needy families throughout the Commonwealth. It also enables Catholic schools to expand their child-care offerings to these populations.

PACE and OCCS will hold a technical workshop on October 2, 2003 at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester from 8:30 a.m. to 2:45 p.m. for those Catholic schools interested in enrolling voucher-eligible students. For more information or to register, contact PACE.

PACE is a non-profit advocacy organization dedicated to serving Catholic Schools in Massachusetts.

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