



Parents Alliance for Catholic Education

PACE News

Fall 2003

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

In a far-reaching move, the Massachusetts Office of Child Care Services (OCCS) has opened the way for Catholic schools to accept voucher payments for preschool (ages 3-5) and after-school (ages 5-12) programs. The opinion comes at the request of PACE and offers new opportunities for Catholic schools to serve disadvantaged families who are eligible for assistance in paying for child care.

"The OCCS decision enables income-eligible families, for the first time, to choose a Catholic school to provide child-care services, while receiving their fair share of financial assistance," said Steve Perla, executive director, PACE.

Safe, affordable child-care services are in chronic

demand in Massachusetts, and Catholic schools statewide are doing an outstanding job of providing stimulating and nurturing preschool and after-school child-care services to thousands of children of working families. The OCCS decision provides more choice and opportunity to needy families throughout the Commonwealth.

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.

Any family interested in applying for financial assistance should contact their local Child Care Resource and Referral Agency. Agencies near you can be found at www.qualitychildcare.org. Catholic schools interested in accepting vouchers can contact PACE for information.

The OCCS decision provides more choice and opportunity to needy families throughout the Commonwealth.

Catholic Schools to Receive \$4 Million in Reading First Grants

PACE and the Massachusetts Department of Education have established a special arrangement to secure *Reading First* grant funding for the Commonwealth's eligible Catholic schools. Through the *Reading First* program, \$4 million in federal money over the next six years will be directed to Massachusetts Catholic schools.

Established under the federal *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, the *Reading First* grant program was created to ensure that disadvantaged students are reading proficiently by the end of third grade. Recipient Catholic schools in the Commonwealth will have access to reading specialists, instructional materials, education technology and teacher training to enhance reading outcomes.

In making *Reading First* awards, the Department of Education has given priority to public school districts and non-public schools with high concentrations of disadvantaged students who need improvement in reading. The funding is available to public, private and religious schools.

In a newly established formula, PACE asked the Department of Education to set aside an annual amount of *Reading First* funding for the state's eligible non-public



Catholic school principals from across the state learned from Department of Education officials how to utilize *Reading First* grant funding. The PACE-sponsored workshop was held at the College of the Holy Cross in August.

schools. This unprecedented arrangement makes it easier for Catholic schools to access and utilize the federal funds to which they are entitled under law.

Thirty two Catholic schools in Massachusetts will be served by this program during the 2003-04 school year alone. Recipients will have the potential for an additional four years of funding and a new round of grants funding will expand the number of Catholic schools participating in the coming year.

PACE and the Catholic Schools Foundation Launch Poverty Data Collection Project

PACE and the Catholic Schools Foundation (CSF) have embarked on an important venture to increase the rate of return of poverty data from families of students enrolled in Archdiocese of Boston inner-city schools.

The purpose of the project is to generate a more accurate count of students in poverty attending our schools. The project is expected to significantly improve school eligibility and allocations for many federal grants, which often are tied to a school's number of students who live in poverty. However, substantial barriers exist in

collecting financial information from students who attend inner-city Catholic schools.

Sister Kathleen Carr, Superintendent of the Catholic School Office for the Archdiocese of Boston, was instrumental in bringing PACE and CSF together to collaborate on this important initiative.



Maria Webb (left), president of the Center for Educational Partnerships listens to Sr. Francis Miriam Conway, SSND, Director of Ed. Services, Boston Archdiocese Catholic Schools Office at the conclusion of a focus group on improving poverty data collection at inner-city schools.

Through a special grant from the Catholic Schools Foundation, PACE has retained the services of the Center for Educational Partnerships (CEP) of Chicago, IL to lead the project. CEP has expertise in data collection and has been successful in securing significant additional government dollars for private and religious schools throughout the United States.

To carry out the project, CEP will enlist and train dozens of Boston College graduate students to work on-site at Archdiocese of Boston inner-city schools,

focusing on 17-points of data collection. The project began in September and will be completed by early November 2003. The impact of this new data on entitlements and grant allocations for Archdiocese of Boston schools will begin during 2004-05 academic year.

PACE Issues Overcome Beacon Hill Budget Reductions

Despite the significant reductions in the FY2004 state budget, the Massachusetts legislature voted in favor of funding school nursing and school breakfast accounts for Catholic schools. PACE's legislative action network of parents was instrumental in sounding the alarm to legislators and saving these programs.

The nursing measure involved a legislative override to Governor Romney's veto in order to sustain the program. Except for State Senator JoAnne Sprague (R-Walpole), both the House and Senate unanimously voted to save the program, although at a reduced level of service. The school breakfast program, however, was level funded.

PACE's request for transportation services for Catholic students in 7th-12th grades was supported by two-thirds of the House and a majority of the Senate, however it was vetoed by the Governor. PACE is currently working with the Administration to attempt to develop alternative language and resolve this issue.

Attention Parents: PACE Needs You!

PACE needs parent representatives from each Catholic school in the state to advance our issues in the public arena! To be a parent rep, all you need is a willing heart and a few hours of service. Parent reps attend two to three regional meetings per year, our annual Statehouse Advocacy Day and are available to periodically contact legislators with information in support of Catholic school initiatives. PACE provides the background, information and contacts to you when your timely help is needed. Talk to your school principal today about being a PACE parent rep or joining our legislative advocacy electronic network!

The Parents Alliance for Catholic Education is a non-profit, public policy and advocacy organization dedicated to serving the 84,000 students attending Catholic schools in Massachusetts. For comments, questions or additional copies of this publication, contact PACE, 14 Beacon Street, Suite 510 Boston, MA 02108 (617) 723-9890 www.pacesite.org.

Show School Pride!

Submit your photos to PACE

PACE is redesigning our Website. We would love to include photos of Catholic school students and teachers in action to showcase our schools for all our visitors! Please forward print or electronic pictures to PACE and include subject details. Be sure that you have obtained permission to use a particular child's image. PACE will not list a child's proper name, only grade, school and city/town.