



Most Rev. Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap
Archbishop of Denver

Statements

Colorado bishops release statement supporting new state voucher program

November 6, 2003

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

Last spring, Colorado lawmakers passed, and Gov. Bill Owens signed, HB 1160, the Colorado Opportunity Contract Pilot Program. This new, historic legislation offers low-income families in 11 public school districts in Colorado the opportunity to choose the school that best meets the education needs of their children.

We, the Catholic bishops of Colorado, believe that the Opportunity Contract Pilot Program creates a vital, meaningful new way to help private and public school students throughout Colorado.

The mission of Catholic schools and programs of educational choice fit together naturally. Both serve the proper rights of parents.

In 1965, Pope Paul VI wrote that:

Parents who have the primary and inalienable right and duty to educate their children must enjoy true liberty in their choice of schools. Consequently, the public power, which has the obligation to protect and defend the rights of citizens, must see to it, in its concern for distributive justice, that public subsidies are paid out in such a way that parents are truly free to choose according to their conscience the schools they want for their children.

The Catholic Church in Colorado has served children in her schools for more than a century. During the 2002-2003 school year, more than 18,000 students attended 57 Catholic schools throughout our state. In fact, Catholic schools educate more children than any other organization in Colorado outside the public school system. Catholic schools offer an invaluable service not only to the Church, but also to the greater Colorado community, by forming students in academic excellence and strong moral character.

Catholic schools have always worked hard to bring quality education to all children. Two examples that illustrate this mission in action are Annunciation and Loyola Catholic Schools, both in Denver. Annunciation Catholic School has a student population that is 85 percent Hispanic. At Loyola Catholic School, more than 95 percent of the students are African-American and more than 70 percent are not Catholic — but all benefit from a quality of education found in Catholic schools. Similar stories mark other Catholic schools throughout the dioceses of Denver, Colorado Springs and Pueblo.

The goal of the Opportunity Contract Pilot Program is to draw parents into a deeper, more fruitful involvement in their child's education. The legislature realizes that regardless of economic status, race or religion, children will decide our nation's future. They need to be our highest educational priority. We, the Catholic bishops of Colorado, salute the Colorado Legislature for recognizing this need. Whatever legal challenges lie ahead, we believe educational choice serves the whole community. We commit ourselves to that goal. We look forward to contributing even more fully to Colorado's common good through our schools.

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