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## Scholarship Recipients Face Uncertain Future After Legislature Failed to Act

It is difficult to put into words the level of disappointment so many are experiencing today after learning the Illinois General Assembly failed to renew the Invest in Kids Act.

This year alone, Invest in Kids is providing more than 9,500 scholarships to qualifying low-income families who want their child to attend a non-public school. Due to the cruelty of the Illinois General Assembly, those 9,500 scholarships will not be available next school year. In addition, the hopes of more than 26,000 students on a waitlist who so desperately want a scholarship have been dashed as has using Invest in Kids scholarships at high school-level trade schools.

Sadly, we expected more from our elected state senators, representatives and Governor. At the very least, we expected them to represent the opinions of their constituents. An Impact Research poll conducted in August 2023 found that a majority of Illinois voters supports the program in all regions of the State; most notably it is supported by parents, voters of color and voters with incomes below \$40,000 per year. Support remains high even after voters hear arguments about the program from critics and proponents alike. Who, then, are the members of the Illinois General Assembly who did not support renewal representing?

Six years ago, supporters of Invest in Kids were told that this was a pilot program. We were asked to see how it goes. Here is how it has gone:

- Of the 40,000 families who have received a scholarship, more than 97 percent are satisfied with the program. Children report they feel safe in school, and they are learning.
- The demand for the program is staggering – for every child in the program, three are on a waiting list due to funding constraints.
- The number of Black and Latino children in the program has grown steadily, and Black and Latino students participate in the program at higher rates than in public schools.

Where do we go from here? Despite this setback, we will build on the incredible efforts of the thousands of people who went to Springfield, wrote letters, called their legislators, put up yard signs and attended the many Town Hall meetings. Those efforts resulted in a lot of support to continue the program, and one could argue a majority does support it. We are grateful to those lawmakers who came out publicly to renew the program so more scholarships could be awarded.

The General Assembly reconvenes in January. We must continue our efforts to find a way that allows for more educational opportunities such as Invest in Kids for low-income students and parents who need this program.

This work is not over. The kids are worth the fight.