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## Illinois State Board of Education Issues Deeply Flawed Report on Tax Credit Scholarship Recipient Test Scores

*New research compiled by an independent consulting firm released by ISBE*

**SPRINGFIELD** – In a new report conducted for the Illinois State Board of Education that can be found [here](#), analysts failed to compare low-income Tax Credit Scholarship recipients to their low-income counterparts in Illinois public schools. The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) makes testing data readily available to sort by income levels, but researchers instead compared low-income scholarship recipients to all Illinois public school students, rendering the results meaningless because they lack proper context. In fact, low-income Tax Credit Scholarship recipients actually outperform their low-income counterparts enrolled in public schools in nearly every category according to ISBE’s own data.

**Dr. Patrick Wolf**, College of Education Department Head at the University of Arkansas, is offering his independent analysis of the test score data: “The evaluators made highly inappropriate comparisons between the average test score gains of the income-disadvantaged students in the program and the average gains for all public school students statewide. That comparison is apples-to-zebras and tells us nothing about the effect of the program on student achievement.”

“What belies this flawed study is the overwhelming satisfaction parents and students provided regarding their schools’ safety, climate, teachers, and educational opportunities. These findings demonstrate the immense value Invest in Kids gives to low-income scholarship families across the state of Illinois,” said **Bobby Sylvester, executive director of Empower Illinois**. “Parents and students showed above 95% agreement that their scholarship schools provide equitable access and opportunity to high-quality general academic programs. This highlights why the Illinois legislature must renew the Invest in Kids Act (IICA) to help level the playing field for low-income students.”

Here are some highlights of the qualitative polling of IICA scholarship parents:

- 98% say their school environment is safe.
- 98% say their school climate is positive.
- 98% say their teachers care about their child(ren).
- 98% say their children are getting a quality education.
- 97% say students of all backgrounds have equitable access and opportunity to high-quality general academic programs.
- 97% say their school has high expectations for student behavior.
- 96% say students of all backgrounds have equitable access and opportunity to receive academic support (e.g., remediation, tutoring).
- 95% say students of all backgrounds have equitable access and opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities.

Similarly, scholarship students offered high praise:

- 95% feel safe at school.

- 95% say students of all backgrounds have equal opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities.
- 94% say their teachers care about me.
- 94% can get help from teachers if needed.
- 94% say students of all backgrounds have equal opportunity to receive academic extra help or tutoring.

**Rabbi Shlomo Soroka, director of government affairs for Agudath Israel of Illinois**, added, “While the parental survey polling data highlights the enthusiastic parent satisfaction we expected, we are disappointed with how the researchers did not compare comparable test scores. Instead, low-income scholarship recipients’ test scores were compared to all average Illinois public school students. Despite this inequity, the low-income scholarship students performed admirably, especially on their SATs in high school. We know if researchers had compared scholarship students to equally low-income public school students, those who received the benefit of a Tax Credit Scholarship would have scored much higher than their lower income-equivalent counterparts.”

“Regarding special education services, school officials shared their concerns with researchers about the state’s current lack of financial resources allocated to educate students in private schools with behavioral issues and those who require more specific special education services,” said **Robert Gilligan, executive director of the Catholic Conference of Illinois**. “Members of the General Assembly who are champions for kids should note that schools expressed an interest in adding special education opportunities, counseling, and after-school programs if funded.”

The Invest in Kids Act Tax Credit Scholarship Program is an investment in opportunities for kids, poverty reduction, and economic acceleration. The General Assembly’s failure to take action in 2023 to save the program will cause over 14,000 students from low-income families to lose their scholarships and now may have to leave their best-fit schools. Reinstating the program this spring is unmistakably the right thing to do.

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### **About the Invest in Kids Act**

The bipartisan Invest in Kids Act passed in 2017 and created the Evidence-Based Funding model for public schools and Illinois’ Tax Credit Scholarship Program, which provides scholarships to kids from low-income and working-class families to attend their best-fit private school. All students qualify based on financial need. Since the program’s inception, nearly 41,000 scholarships have been awarded statewide. The Invest in Kids Act was allowed to sunset at the end of 2023.

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