



Big Shoulders Fund.

Before parents know it, they will be sending their children off to school once again. In the meantime, parents, particularly those who have concerns with their current school, ought to consider a Catholic school for their children.

Catholic schools look to give children the faith-based, values-centered education that they need to succeed in life. Even if people believe that a Catholic education is a viable alternative, many questions may still arise. A frequent question is affordability, which often inhibits a family from sending their child to a Catholic school. To help alleviate the financial distresses a family may have, the Big Shoulders Fund was founded in 1986 to provide support to these Catholic schools in the neediest areas of inner-city Chicago. Of the funds raised, 100 percent go to support children through scholarships, special education programs, instructional equipment, facility improvements, faculty support and operating grants with the goal of making the Catholic education more affordable. Currently, there are 93 Catholic schools in the Chicago area that receive between \$10 and \$12 million annually in scholarships and operation grants.

Another concern parents might have is that their child is not Catholic. In reality, a third of students in Big Shoulders Fund schools are not Catholic. These schools are inclusive and reach out to a diverse group of students. Catholic schools provide help to parents working multiple jobs or long hours by having extended hours during the school week. Generally, these hours range from 6 in the morning to 6 at night allowing children to socialize and build friendships among their peers.

Academically, Catholic schools continue to demonstrate success in a number of ways. The attendance rate of the elementary school student is 97% and the high school attendance rate is 95%.

Additionally, the average class size in a Big Shoulders Fund supported school is less than 20 students allowing each individual student to receive the necessary academic and social attention they need. Studies continue to show that the longer a student is in a Catholic school, the better they perform academically with students by seventh grade performing well above the national norms. Arguably most importantly, 96 percent of Big Shoulders students graduate from high school and 87 percent pursue higher education. Thus, the future is undeniably bright for the Big Shoulders student.

Unfortunately, Catholic schools across the country have been forced to close their doors due to declining enrollment and lack of financial support. For additional information about Catholic education, a school in your neighborhood, or to help support Big Shoulders, visit the Big Shoulders Fund website at www.bigshouldersfund.org or call our hotline at 312.544.8687 or email info@bigshouldersfund.org.

