



December 2018

Dear Catholic School Families,

We are excited to share the following important information on how to apply for tax credit scholarships for the 2019/20 school year.

Through the "Invest in Kids Act," tax credit scholarships are available to Illinois children, in grades K-12, from low-income households who want to attend private schools, including our 209 Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Chicago. This program started during the 2018/19 school year and many families in our Catholic schools are benefiting. The scholarships are funded by donors who receive a 75 percent credit on their Illinois state income tax as a result of their donation. The scholarships offered through the program could cover up to 100 percent of tuition and eligible fees for one year and they are awarded on a first come, first served basis. **If you received a tax credit scholarship this year (2018/19 school year), you must reapply for a tax credit scholarship for next year (2019/20 school year).**

You need to apply for tax credit scholarships through a scholarship granting organization (SGO), which distributes the scholarships. The Archdiocese of Chicago is working with two SGOs: Empower Illinois and Big Shoulders Fund SGO.

Eligibility

K-12 students with limited financial resources and income up to 300 percent of the federal poverty level, are eligible to receive tax credit scholarships. Returning tax credit scholarship recipients, can make up to 400 percent of the federal poverty level. Before April 1, 2019, priority will be given to students from each of the following categories:

- Members of a household whose previous year's total annual income does not exceed 185 percent of the federal poverty level (\$46,435 for a family of four); OR
- Reside within a focus district* OR
- Received a scholarship from a scholarship granting organization during the previous school year; OR
- Siblings of a current scholarship recipient.

After April 1, 2019, all other qualifying students will be considered for scholarships, subject to availability of funds.

**Focus districts are public school districts that have a school where at least one subgroup of students performs in the bottom 10 percent statewide or a graduation rate of less than 60 percent.*

What You Need to Apply

You need proof of Illinois residency and your adjusted gross income to apply for tax credit scholarships. Choose your most recent household and income documents from the same year to use throughout your application.

Proof of Illinois Residence (one of the following for the household):

- Illinois driver's license with current address
- Illinois identification card (issued by the Secretary of State) with current address
- Utility bill with name and current address



- Statement of benefits from WIC or SNAP with name and current address
- W-2 or 1099 with name and current address
- Residential lease (current address) in the parent's name
- Federal Form 1040 with name and current address

Adjusted Gross Income (one of the following for the household):

- Federal tax return, pages 1 and 2**
- W-2
- 1099(s)
- Year-end pay stub
- Letter, on company letterhead, from employer(s) indicating cash wages paid.

**if your federal tax return is not available to you and you receive WIC or SNAP benefits, you may submit your statement of WIC and SNAP benefits.

Valid Email Address (e.g. Gmail, Hotmail, AOL, etc.)

Empower Illinois Application Process and Key Dates

The Empower Illinois tax credit scholarship application is a two-step process:

Step 1: On Tuesday, January 15, 2019 at 7 p.m., you will complete a brief reservation form on Empower Illinois' website – EmpowerIllinois.org – that timestamps your reservation. This is a critical step as your timestamp matters and may impact your chances of receiving a scholarship. You will want to complete this form right at 7 p.m. Minutes matter.

The reservation form will ask you for the following information:

- Parent name
- Contact information – address, phone number, email address
- Child(ren) name(s)***

***Please note: All children you would like to apply for need to be listed on the reservation form. If you do not add a child on the initial reservation but you would like to apply for a tax credit scholarship for that child, you will be required to complete a second reservation and any additional children will receive a separate (later) time stamp.

Step 2: Beginning on or about Friday, January 18, 2019, you may complete the full scholarship application through the Empower Illinois online student portal. You will receive instructions via email about setting up your student portal after your reservation has been completed (step 1). Empower Illinois will begin awarding scholarships on Monday, January 28, 2019. Scholarship awards are subject to the availability of funds at your school of choice. We recommend you submit your application **before Monday, January 28** to increase your chances of receiving a scholarship.

Please note: The Empower Illinois application will be available in English, Spanish and Polish.

For more information, visit EmpowerIllinois.org.

The Archdiocese of Chicago has team members available to assist you with the tax credit scholarship application process. To learn more, please visit archchicago.org/tcs or contact the Archdiocese at investinkids@archchicago.org or 312.534.5321.

Blessings to you and your family this holiday season!

Yours in Christ,

Jim Rigg, Ph.D.
Superintendent of Catholic Schools
Archdiocese of Chicago



STEP-BY-STEP INSTRUCTIONS 2019-2020 SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATION

► The application is a two-part process:

A brief reservation form, which will timestamp your application, available **January 15, 2019 at 7 p.m.**

The complete application, which requires household documents, available **January 18, 2019.**

If you need assistance, call 309-416-0741 or email scholars@empowerillinois.org.

I. RESERVATION

- On Tuesday, January 15, 2019 at 7 p.m. applicant families can visit EmpowerIllinois.org to access the reservation form and begin your application.
- You will be asked to provide your name, phone number, home address, email address, and all your students' names.
- Please note: the order in which you list your students on the reservation is the order in which your family's scholarships will be awarded.
- Submitting this form will timestamp your reservation. Your timestamp matters and may impact your chances of receiving a scholarship.
- Please note: Only one reservation is required per family, even if you are applying for several students. Be sure, however, to list all students you are applying for on your reservation. If you forget a child, you will need to make a separate reservation for that child.
- After completing your reservation, you will receive instructions by email about accessing your student portal. Beginning Friday, January 18, 2019, you can use your student portal to complete part two of the application. You can complete part two whenever you are able, but we encourage you to submit your application before January 28, 2019 to have the best chance at receiving a scholarship.

II. APPLICATION

- Through your student portal, you can now begin part two of the application process. Part two consists of six steps.
- Part two may take some time to complete. If you cannot complete it at one time, you can pick up where you left off the next time you log in to the student portal. When you have answered all the questions for each step, remember to click on "save and continue."
- Until your full application has been completed, your portal status will show as "Application Incomplete." Remember, you can pick up where you left off, provided you clicked "save and continue" before exiting the application.
- You will need to upload required documents. Check page 3 for a list of required documents. These documents include providing financial information.

**STEP
01**

Eligibility Check

- Step 1 will determine your eligibility. You will be asked to provide your address, income information, and some household details. You will also need to provide information about each child who would like to apply for a scholarship.
- If a student is **not** eligible, you will receive a notice explaining why.
- If a student is eligible, you will receive a "thumbs up." Please click "continue" to complete the entire application.

**STEP
02**

Parent/Custodian Information

- Step 2 requests information about parents or custodians. You will need to provide your name, date of birth, address, relationship to applicant(s), and your work status.
- You must provide this information for both parents or custodians, if there is more than one.

**STEP
03**

Household Financial Information

- Step 3 requests household financial information. You will need to answer questions about your tax status including:
 - » Did your household file your federal taxes in 2017 or 2018?
 - » If you do not have a Form 1040, did you or any adult members of your household receive a Form 1099? If so, please total the amounts that appear on your Form 1099s.
 - » Do you have a Form 1040 or 1099? If not, please total the amount from the most recent paystub or W-2 from all employers for all adult members of your household.

**STEP
04**

Student Information

- Step 4 requests information about the student applicants. It is very important to provide information for **every** student who wishes to apply for a scholarship.
- You will be asked to provide basic information about the student's education and learning abilities.
- You must also list your choice of schools, in order of preference. Scholarships are awarded when funds at your school become available. We will make every effort to match students with their first-choice school.

**STEP
05**

Required Documentation

- Step 5 requests documents to verify your income and your address. We will accept a PDF or clear photo of these documents.
- **Before you begin this step, you must have ALL verification documents ready.** You will need to upload them electronically, with your application.



EMPOWER ILLINOIS

Scholarship Granting Organization

Tax Credit Scholarships

APPLICATION PROCESS AND KEY DATES

STEP 1:

On Tuesday, January 15, 2019 at 7 p.m. CT, you will complete a brief reservation form on Empower Illinois' website – empowerillinois.org – that timestamps your reservation. This is a critical step as your timestamp matters and may impact your chances of receiving a scholarship. You will want to complete this form right at 7 p.m. CT. Minutes matter.

The reservation form will ask you for the following information:

- Parent name
- Contact information – address, phone number, email address
- Child(ren) name(s) include ALL children for whom you would like to apply for a scholarship

STEP 2:

Beginning on or about Friday, January 18, 2019, you may complete the full scholarship application through the Empower Illinois online student portal. You will receive instructions via email about setting up your student portal after your reservation has been completed (step 1). Empower Illinois will begin awarding scholarships on Monday, January 28, 2019. Scholarship awards are subject to the availability of funds at your school of choice. We recommend you submit your application **before Monday, January 28, 2019** to increase your chances of receiving a scholarship.

If a student received a tax credit scholarship for the 2018/19 school year from Empower Illinois, you need to indicate that in your application when asked. If a student received a tax credit scholarship for the 2018/19 school year from another SGO (not Empower Illinois), when asked in the application you need to upload a copy of the letter from your school indicating you received a scholarship.

The Empower Illinois application will be available in English, Spanish and Polish.

For more information, empowerillinois.org.

APPLICATION MATERIALS

To apply, you need proof of Illinois residency, your adjusted gross income and a valid email address. Choose your most recent household and income documents from the same year to use throughout your application. We recommend securing these materials and scanning copies or taking photos of them now, so you have them on-hand when it is time to complete the application.

Proof of Illinois Residence (one of the following for the household):

- Illinois driver's license with current address
- Illinois identification card (issued by the Secretary of State) with current address
- Utility bill with name and current address
- Statement of benefits from WIC or SNAP with name and current address
- W-2 or 1099 with name and current address
- Residential lease (current address) in the parent's name
- Federal Form 1040 with name and current address

Adjusted Gross Income (one of the following for the household):

- Federal tax return, pages 1 and 2*
- W-2
- 1099(s)
- Year-end pay stub
- Letter, on company letterhead, from employer(s) indicating cash wages paid.

Valid Email Address (e.g. Gmail, Hotmail, AOL, etc.)



*Note: You may submit your statement of WIC and SNAP benefits if your federal tax return is not available to you.

- You will need to provide your family's most recent tax return for 2017 or 2018. If that is not available, you will need to provide one of the following:
 - » W-2 forms
 - » Form 1099s
 - » Year-end pay stubs
 - » A letter on letterhead from your employer indicating cash wages paid
- You may need a document to prove you currently live in Illinois. If your current address matches the address on the Form 1040, W-2, or paystubs as uploaded above, no other address documentation is required.
If not, you must upload one of the following:
 - » A current driver's license
 - » An Illinois ID card
 - » A current utility bill or residential lease
 - » State of benefits from WIC or SNAP
 - » A W-2 form
 - » A 1099
- If your student has a current Individualized Education Plan, or IEP, you must also upload the IEP form.
- If you received a tax credit scholarship last year from an SGO other than Empower Illinois, you must upload a letter from the school where the scholarship was used.

**STEP
06**

Review

- Step 6 is the final step in the application process. You will be asked to verify all submitted information and answer a few remaining questions.
- You will not be able to make any changes to the application once it has been submitted, so please review it carefully before submitting. Any changes you may want to make after submitting the application will require you to contact our Parent Helpline listed below.
- After completing this page and submitting your application, you will have completed the process.
- You will receive a notice that your application has been sent. It includes your Application ID number. Please print this page so you have a copy of your ID number.

Next Steps

- Within 72 hours of submitting your application, you will receive a confirmation email.
- Your portal will provide real-time access to your application status. You will receive email notification when there has been a change to your status at any of the schools you have selected.
- Empower Illinois will begin making awards by February 1, 2019.
- Remember, scholarships are awarded to students whose selected school has available funds, and in the order of the timestamped reservation.

Questions? Call our Parent Helpline at 309-416-0741 or email scholars@empowerillinois.org.