

A STATEMENT FOR THE MARCH FOR SCHOOL FUNDING  
MARCH 27, 1996

FROM THE COUNCIL OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS  
OF METROPOLITAN CHICAGO

We are proud of our nation, our state and our city. There are many ways in which corporations and individuals reach out to people in need. But concern and generosity means more than caring for the weak or vulnerable. It means organization and structure to maintain the significant institutions of our society. In fact, caring about these may well prevent many people from becoming at risk. It is partly for this reason that we are deeply concerned about support for the public schools in our State.

Illinois is among the top ten states in overall wealth. Yet it ranks in the bottom five percent in educational funding.

Two issues stand out in what legitimately may be called a crisis.

- First, the overall funding to education is not high enough. Surely the children of our State deserve better than to be in the bottom five percent of national funding.
- Second, the distribution of funds is not equitable. Because of the way in which educational funding is accomplished in Illinois there are wide disparities in funding to the various school districts.

As religious leaders speaking from the teaching of the Judeo-Christian tradition, we regard wealth as a Divine blessing which bears fruit through sharing with the poor. The Book of Deuteronomy says:

If in any of the towns in the land that the Lord your God is giving you, there is a fellow Israelite in need, then do not be selfish and refuse to help him... There will always be some Israelites who are poor and in need, and so I command you to be generous to them.  
(Deut. 15:7-8,11)

Illinois has failed to live up to its responsibility to educate the children of this state. This failure must be accepted by all citizens. It is dishonest to say that we believe the education of children is a high priority if we are unwilling personally to pay for it. Nor can we say that only one segment our population has this responsibility. Intergenerational equity demands that all of us take responsibility for the generations to come. Perhaps we must deny ourselves some consumption or gratification now in order to secure a future for posterity. Surely the next generation is valuable enough for this.

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Certainly there are more problems in the educational system than money. Wider social problems have called on the schools to perform roles they were never meant to play. More and more the school is becoming an alternative for the family in teaching basic socialization. While these and other wider problems continue to plague the schools, still the two basic financial problems remain. More overall funding is needed and a more just allocation of those funds are problems which must be addressed.

The faith groups we represent are in all of the 103 counties of Illinois. So, as we address this statement to the Legislature, we also address it to our own members. Look at the needs of the schools, not only in your own district, but broadly throughout the area. Look at the children. And as you look, ask yourselves whether or not they deserve for Illinois to stay in the bottom five percent of educational funding. We believe that a strong public educational system is a benefit to us all. We invite our members to take seriously the exhortation in Deuteronomy and to encourage it throughout the legislative process. We also invite all people of good will, who care about the future of Illinois' children to join us in all of these endeavors.

The Council of Religious Leaders of Metropolitan Chicago  
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