

# \$12 million raised to help pupils switch from city's public schools

**Amount gathered for scholarships for parochial or private schools is six times last year's offering.**

By David Hunn  
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**ST. LOUIS** • A Catholic education foundation is looking to give 600 city school students up to \$2,000 each year to move into private and parochial education this fall.

The Today and Tomorrow Educational Foundation has gathered \$12 million — six times last year's offering — to cover nine years of scholarships that aim to steer poor students away from the troubled St. Louis public district and into city private schools.

"That's good for Lutheran schools," said Chuck Conover, president of St. Louis's Lutheran Elementary School Association. "The impact for faith-based non-public schools could be huge."

Foundation leaders hope to boost enrollment at city parochial and private schools in the process, many of which are struggling to fill empty desks.

Students in kindergarten through fourth grade can apply to 18 Catholic schools, six Lutheran schools, six Christian schools and at least four private schools.

The scholarships will follow them through eighth grade.

While no Catholic schools are scheduled to close before this coming year, such scholarships could help delay or prevent closings down the road, said George Henry, superintendent of Catholic education at the St. Louis Archdiocese.

The foundation, part of the archdiocese, has raised money for parochial school scholarships for nearly two decades, Henry said.

But this is the first time a local agency has raised this much for scholarships to so many different private schools, he said.

The foundation piloted the program last year, said board member and campaign chair Kevin M. Short. It offered a similar scholarship to 75 kindergartners, but only for Catholic schools.

Just four donors — the Lay Family Foundation, the Sinquefeld Family Foundation, Eugene and Evie Williams, and local technology company Emerson

— gave all \$12 million.

Some leaders say the program has already made a difference.

Maureen DePriest, principal of St. Frances Cabrini Academy in Benton Park, said four families enrolled this year with help from the pilot program.

The families were working hard, she said — a waitress, an office worker, a gas station attendant. Three were single moms, and would have been hard-pressed to enroll their children without the scholarships.

Jessica Lewis said she didn't want her son Christopher Scott, 6, to go to the local public school. But she didn't see many options.

Now she loves St. Frances.

"It's like a community," she said. "I don't worry about sending him to school, and him being away from me."

To be eligible, students must be new to private schools. Families must make less than the cap for federal free- and reduced-price meals, or roughly \$32,500 for a family of three this fall.

They may also be required to commit to paying \$500 for the year.

Interested families can apply online at [privateschoolscholarships.org](http://privateschoolscholarships.org) or call 1-866-466-0007.