



EMPOWER ILLINOIS

2020 ANNUAL REPORT





Dear Friends,

What a year. It is undeniable that the COVID-19 pandemic acutely impacted hundreds of thousands of low-income and working-class families throughout Illinois, and that these effects have made the pursuit of a high-quality, best-fit education for their children even more challenging. In 2020, we all faced unprecedented difficulties. These challenges also brought into focus our mission and the moral imperative to create opportunity for Illinois' kids. Knowing that thousands of families were counting on us for life-changing scholarships, our team hustled for every dollar that could change a child's life. Our team worked tirelessly to push scholarships out the door as quickly as possible and alleviate the deep economic uncertainty so many scholarship families faced due to the pandemic. We redoubled our commitment to support students in need by creating the Black Education Excellence (BEE) Initiative, restructured our United in Love scholarship to support students in need of emergency funds or those facing severe financial hardships, and increased funding through our RISE Scholarship Program. All of these efforts helped provide more families with more education opportunities at a time when they were needed most.

It is also undeniable that our broad network of donors, civic and school leaders, and families—each and every one of you—has risen to the challenge in truly inspiring ways to help meet these pressing educational needs, knowing that children get only one chance at a quality education. And if this year has shown us anything, it's that students need and deserve a quality education in a safe and caring school community now more than ever.

I am excited to share this annual report with you, first and most importantly, because what it represents is only possible through your partnership. These stories of success and real impact, stories of the Empower Illinois community rising to meet new and unforeseen challenges, are our collective story. It speaks to your tenacity and resilience, to your generosity and dedication, and to your vision for access to quality education at scale. In short, the following pages are reason for hope and celebration, and to work even harder so that one day all children will find their best fit school, a new pathway forward, and an opportunity to become the very best versions of themselves.

As you read on, know that we are grateful for your generous support, your advocacy, and your partnership in this essential mission and good work. Know, too, that our work is not yet finished. In the year ahead, we will need to leverage all the good things we have accomplished to fight for children and their right to a quality education together!

Sincerely,

Anthony Holter
President

OVER
\$167,428,406
RAISED STATEWIDE
(2018-2020)

OVER
\$127,856,300
RAISED BY EMPOWER ILLINOIS
(2018-2020)

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EMPOWER MISSION

The Empower Illinois mission is to expand quality education options for low-income and working-class families of Illinois.

EMPOWER HISTORY

EMPOWER ILLINOIS HAS A **BIG, BOLD MISSION** ROOTED IN THE SIMPLE BELIEF THAT EVERY CHILD SHOULD HAVE ACCESS TO HIGH QUALITY EDUCATION OPTIONS.

Since our founding in 2018, our team members have devoted themselves to this mission through classroom work, scholarship grants, and policy research. These efforts, over many years and under numerous iterations, have become the core of Empower Illinois.

Knowing Illinois and its students are capable of incredible things, Empower Illinois has looked for ways to support students further and identified several areas where we could have a positive impact. These include the under-identification of low-income students and students of color as gifted, the insufficient support for students with unique abilities, the lack of course offerings or diverse pathways for students across learning environments, and the limited access low-income and working-class families have to the same education opportunities as their wealthier peers.

We succeeded in this policy work through strong partnerships, including the Illinois Association for Gifted Children. In 2016, our organizations advocated and passed the Untapped Potential Act, and in 2017 our collaboration once again joined together to advocate and pass the *Accelerated Placement Act*.

Our largest accomplishment once again came through cooperation, as education leaders across the state united to improve the public school funding formula and expand options for all Illinoisans. Through the bipartisan passage of Illinois' *Invest in Kids Act* in 2017, Illinois' Tax Credit Scholarship Program uses private dollars to fund K-12 scholarships for low-income and working-class students, whose education options were previously limited by household income.

With the successful passing of the *Invest in Kids Act*, Empower Illinois quickly established itself as a statewide Scholarship Granting Organization (SGO) to serve Illinois' children. As the leading SGO in our state, Empower Illinois supports schools in their tax credit fundraising efforts while assisting students and their families through the scholarship process in an effort to make their dreams a reality. In under a year, Empower Illinois went from a three-person policy and advocacy organization to Illinois' largest SGO with a full-time staff helping thousands of children reach their full potential.

In the spring of 2019, Empower Illinois led the fight to protect education opportunities for Illinois' kids. When opponents sought to cut and cap the Tax Credit Scholarship Program, Empower Illinois supported a broad coalition in daily advocacy trips to Springfield. Thanks to their efforts, the *Invest in Kids Act* remains intact and scholarship opportunities have continued to empower Illinois' kids.

Today, we are poised to broaden our focus on educational opportunity and ingenuity, always in the service of Illinois' children and their families.

Today, we are poised to broaden our focus on educational opportunity and ingenuity, always in the service of Illinois' children and their families.



EMPOWER LEADERSHIP

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Jack Buck
Daniel P. Daly
Ward Hamm
Karin Norington Reaves
Jim Perry, *Chairperson*
John Schoenig
Avrum Weinfeld

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John Schreiber

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Taylor Zentner, *Development Manager*
Mauricio Zhagui, *Customer Success Agent*



2020 MILESTONES

SUCCESSFUL YEAR THREE APPLICATION LAUNCH

Empower Illinois opened applications for Year Three. Within 24 hours, 23,745 kids reserved their place in line.. By the end of the year, 32,604 kids reserved their spot in line to receive a tax credit scholarship. On January 29, 2020, Empower Illinois awarded our first scholarship of the Fall 2020-Spring 2021 school year.

CUSTOMER SUCCESS TEAM

The Empower Illinois team grew by six new members with the addition of our Customer Success Team. This marked a major milestone for Empower Illinois: all of our team members worked together in one office. While we transitioned to remote work in the spring, the unity we shared at the beginning of the year helped our team grow stronger and better align our work.

EMPOWER ILLINOIS LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

Early this year, our Outreach and Advocacy Team launched the Empower Illinois Leadership Academy—a cohort-based leadership training program that convened, trained and empowered local leaders to support and grow the Invest in Kids Act Tax Credit Scholarship Program. Our inaugural session brought in coalition members from across the state to share ideas on supporting Illinois' kids. We look forward to growing the Leadership Academy and its members in the years to come.

EI HITS \$100M IN DONATIONS

On May 20, 2020, generous donors across the state helped Empower Illinois reach a total of \$100 million in Tax Credit Scholarship Program donations since 2018. This large-scale private investment in Illinois' kids and education is phenomenal. Thousands of students have a brighter future thanks to these dollars granting them access to a best fit school.

BLACK EDUCATION EXCELLENCE INITIATIVE

This summer, our team launched the Black Education Excellence (BEE) Initiative to highlight and support private schools serving the Black community throughout the State of Illinois. This new initiative created a virtual network of schools that help to raise the profile of their good work and support even more students in these schools. We were proud to see this new network gain support through a generous donation matching program in the fall.

15,000TH SCHOLARSHIP AWARDED

Thanks to the generosity of donors across Illinois who care about quality education options, Empower Illinois awarded its 15,000th scholarship on July 7, 2020. Our team was excited and honored to have been able to help so many kids and families in just three years.

NEW WEBSITE

We redesigned the Empower Illinois website this summer. The improved website offers new features, such as live chat with our team, as well as showcasing the growing scope of our work, including information about RISE and UIL scholarships and our critical advocacy campaigns. We are also happy to have improved easily accessed resources for families and schools.

STATEWIDE STAKEHOLDER SURVEYS AND VOTER POLLING

Voices of families, school leaders and donors are critical to the success of our work. Each year, we survey Empower Illinois stakeholders to collect their feedback on what we have done well and what we can improve upon. We want our programs and team to best serve our partners. Their feedback is included in data throughout this report. New this year, we also polled Illinois voters to learn more about how COVID-19 impacted their family's education plan and how they view the Tax Credit Scholarship Program. It was encouraging to see that 54% of Illinoisans support providing low-income and working-class families access to life-changing scholarships.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted, and continues to impact, us all. This reality is especially true for the many thousands of students attending private schools across Illinois—and especially those who face additional economic uncertainty and potential instability in their children's education.

During these challenging times, Empower Illinois was grateful to partner with so many wonderful schools and teachers. Our network of over 418 schools rose to the challenge to meet the academic needs of the children they serve, ensuring that students had access to learning resources, completed their assignments, and stayed connected to their classmates. Equally as important as academics, schools also provided community and wraparound services for students' physical and emotional needs.

Generous program donors ensured that scholarship continued to be funded, despite facing potential economic challenges of their own. Through donor support, 2020 fundraising remained as high as previous years. This generosity was crucial to keeping kids in the school that was serving them best during a difficult time.

The Empower Illinois team, too, worked extremely hard to maintain our level of service to families and schools. We continued to process donations, review applications, and award scholarships to students across the state uninterrupted. Additionally, our team worked with a national network of experts to curate a bank of high quality resources available to school leaders and families. This collection included information on remote learning, free education resources, and connections to community services.

Empower Illinois remains committed to serving our school and family partners, no matter the obstacles. Kids only get one chance at a quality education, and we all have a vital role to play.

BY THE NUMBERS

OVER
\$167,428,406
RAISED STATEWIDE
(2018-2020)

OVER
\$127,856,300
RAISED BY EMPOWER ILLINOIS
(2018-2020)

IN 2020

\$41,429,026

million raised

Over 95% directly funds scholarships

5,505
scholarships

\$6,297
average scholarship
amount



418

schools receiving
awards

**\$38,403
OR 153%**

of the poverty level,
average family
household income of
scholarship recipients



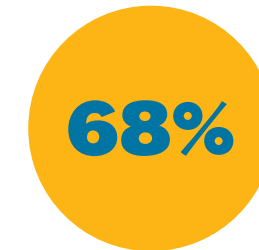
92%

of eligible private
schools partner
with EI

2,751
donors

\$3,000
median donation

\$1,000
most common
donation



of scholarships go to
families who make
less than 185% of
the poverty level



of scholarships go to
families who make
between 185%-250%
of the poverty level



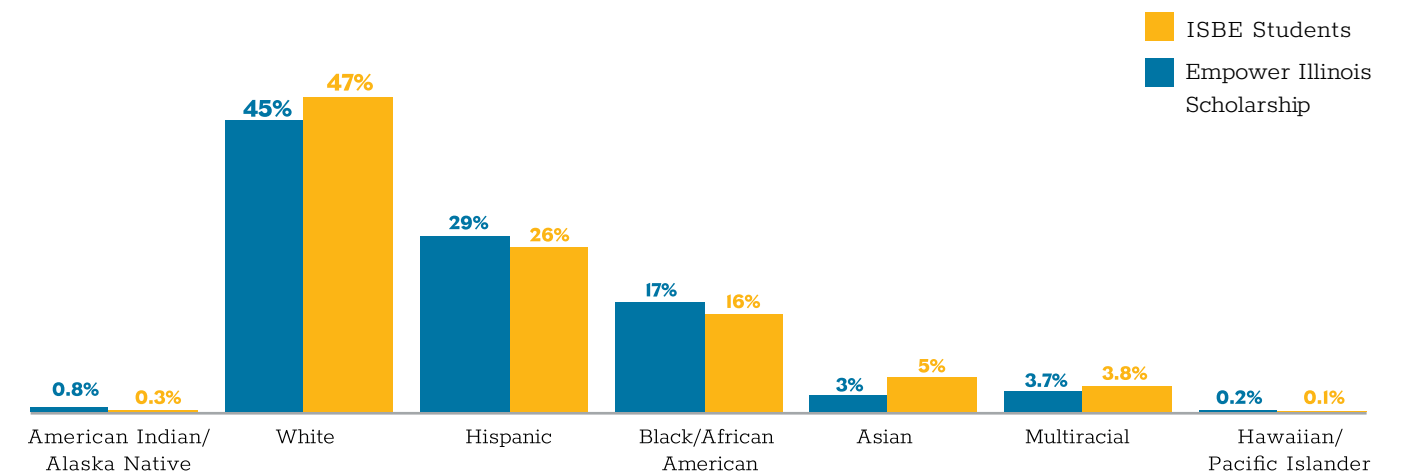
of scholarships go to
families who make
between 250%-400%
of the poverty level

22,142
APPLICANTS

1 IN 8
STUDENTS HAVE
UNIQUE NEEDS

100%
QUALIFY BASED
ON NEED

EMPOWER ILLINOIS' SCHOLARSHIPS ALIGN WITH THE STATE'S STUDENT DEMOGRAPHIC DATA



STUDENTS IN LINE

DEMAND FOR TAX CREDIT SCHOLARSHIPS IN ILLINOIS IS OVERWHELMING, TOPPING OVER **\$200 MILLION**. CURRENT FUNDING ALLOWED ONLY **17%** OF APPLICANTS TO RECEIVE A SCHOLARSHIP IN THE FALL 2020-SPRING 2021 SCHOOL YEAR.

These numbers underscore the demand for the Tax Credit Scholarship Program and speak to the power of quality education options. Empower Illinois will continue to protect and hopefully expand the Tax Credit Scholarship

Program so that each of the 32,604 kids in line for a scholarship can receive an education that best fits their needs.



32,604

kids in line



\$205,405,200

required to fund all kids
who want a scholarship



17%

demand met

WHEN ASKED TO RANK WHICH REASONS FAMILIES OPTED TO APPLY FOR A TAX CREDIT SCHOLARSHIP TO ATTEND A PRIVATE SCHOOL, FAMILIES PLACED THESE AMONG THEIR TOP 5:

1

Wanted a school
with higher academic
quality

2

Wanted a school
with religious/fait-
based instruction

3

Wanted a school
with character/values
instruction

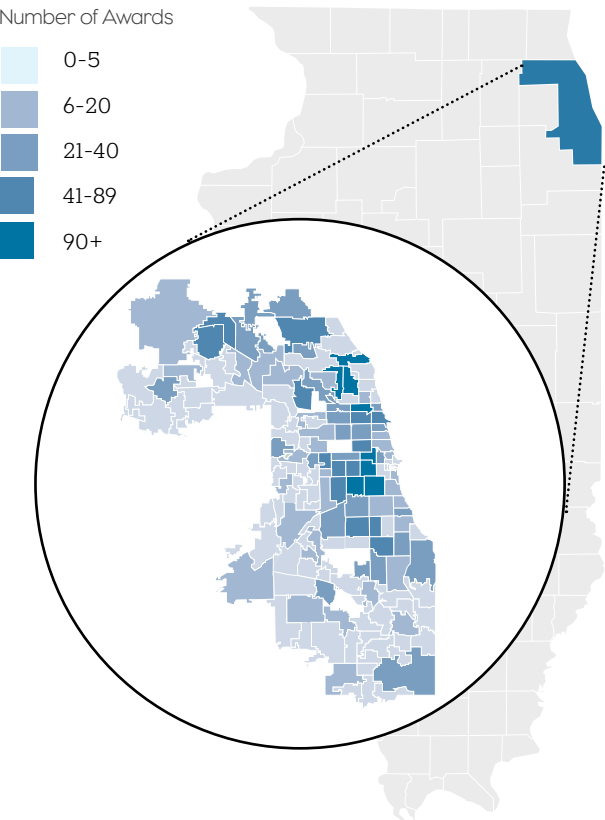
4

Wanted a school
with smaller class
sizes

5

Wanted a safer school

REGION 1



13,648
TOTAL NUMBER OF APPLICANTS

2,994
TOTAL NUMBER OF AWARDEES

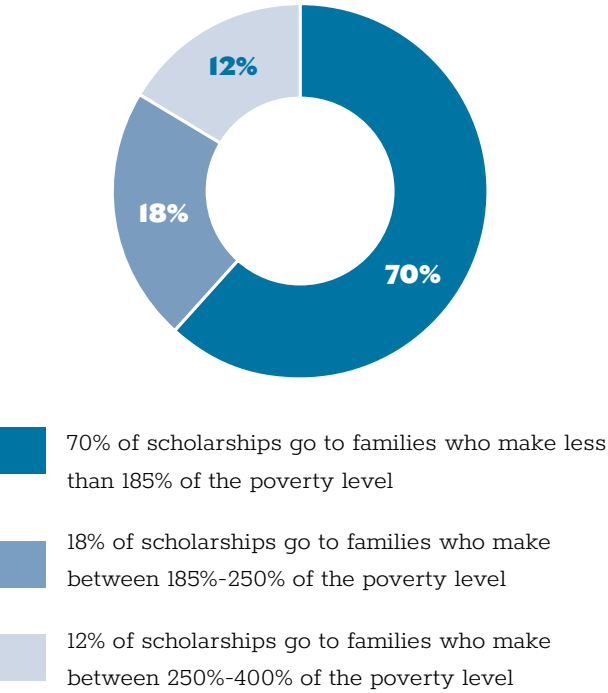
\$27,407,440
DONATED



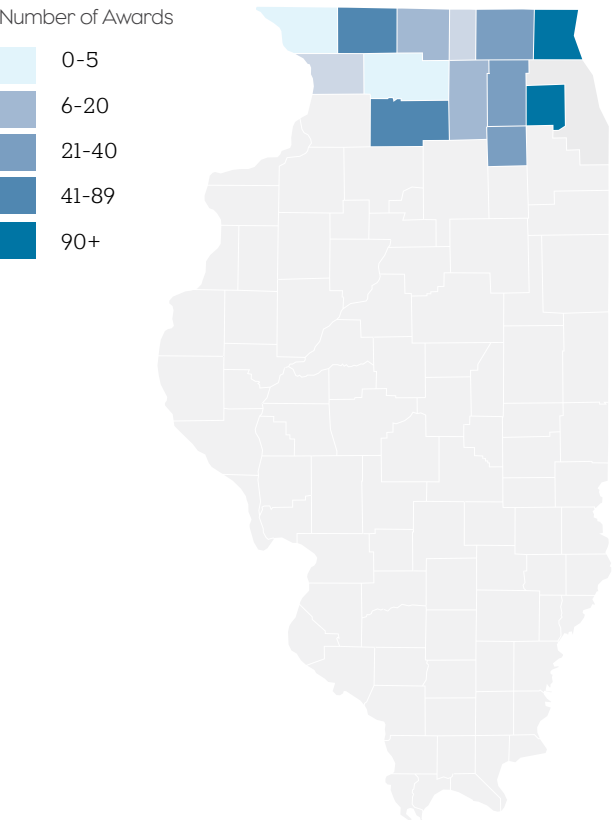
ETHNIC/RACIAL DEMOGRAPHICS

RACE/ ETHNICITY	PERCENT OF STUDENTS
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.9%
Asian	3.5%
Black/African American	23.4%
Hispanic	33.4%
Multiracial	3.5%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0.3%
White	35.0%
GRAND TOTAL	100%

SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS



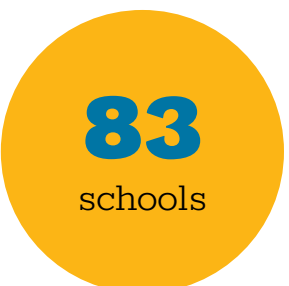
REGION 2



4,078
TOTAL NUMBER OF APPLICANTS

1,025
TOTAL NUMBER OF AWARDEES

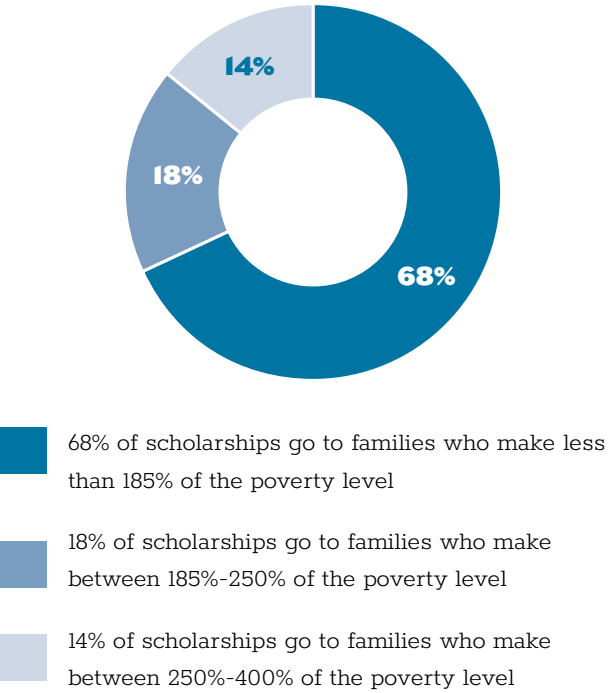
\$7,793,244
DONATED



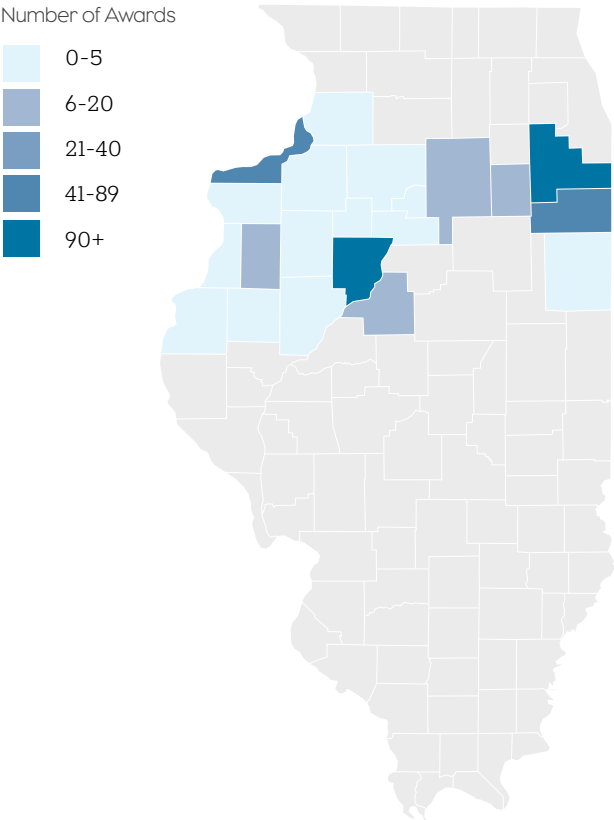
ETHNIC/RACIAL DEMOGRAPHICS

RACE/ ETHNICITY	PERCENT OF STUDENTS
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.7%
Asian	2.8%
Black/African American	8.9%
Hispanic	35.4%
Multiracial	4.0%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0.4%
White	46.7%
GRAND TOTAL	100%

SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS



REGION 3



2,111
TOTAL NUMBER OF APPLICANTS

608
TOTAL NUMBER OF AWARDEES

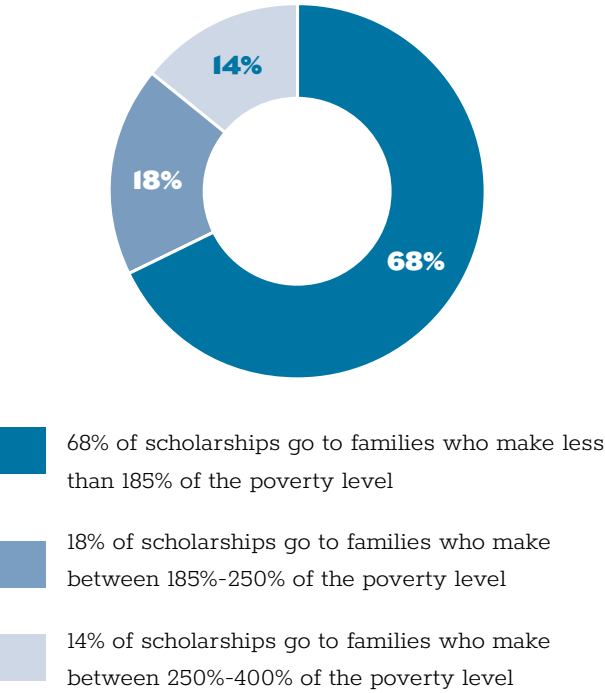
\$2,822,362
DONATED



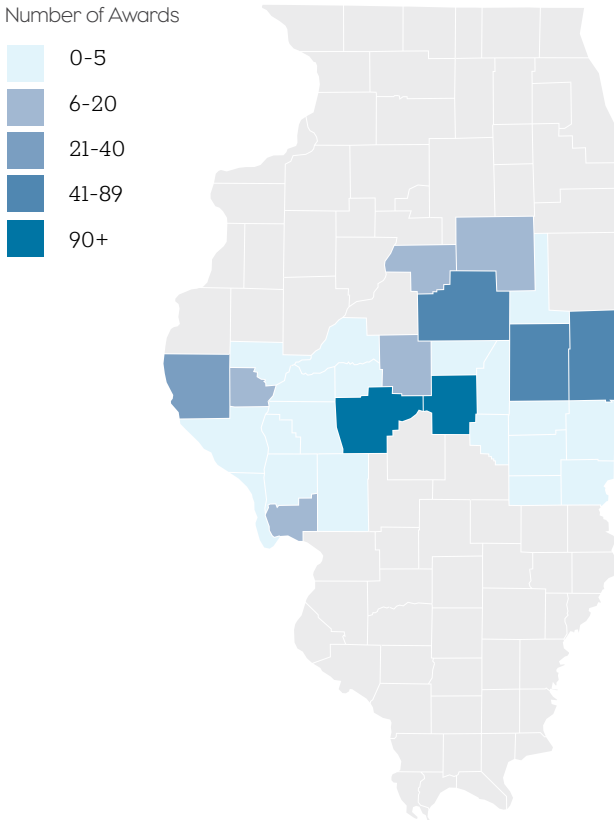
ETHNIC/RACIAL DEMOGRAPHICS

RACE/ ETHNICITY	PERCENT OF STUDENTS
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.7%
Asian	1.3%
Black/African American	8.6%
Hispanic	32.5%
Multiracial	4.6%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0.2%
White	52.2%
GRAND TOTAL	100%

SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS



REGION 4



1,484
TOTAL NUMBER OF APPLICANTS

508
TOTAL NUMBER OF AWARDEES

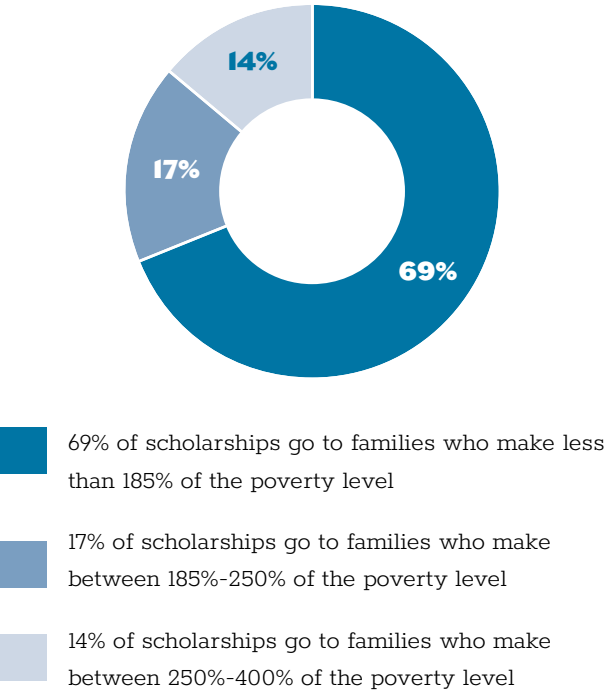
\$2,103,025
DONATED



ETHNIC/RACIAL DEMOGRAPHICS

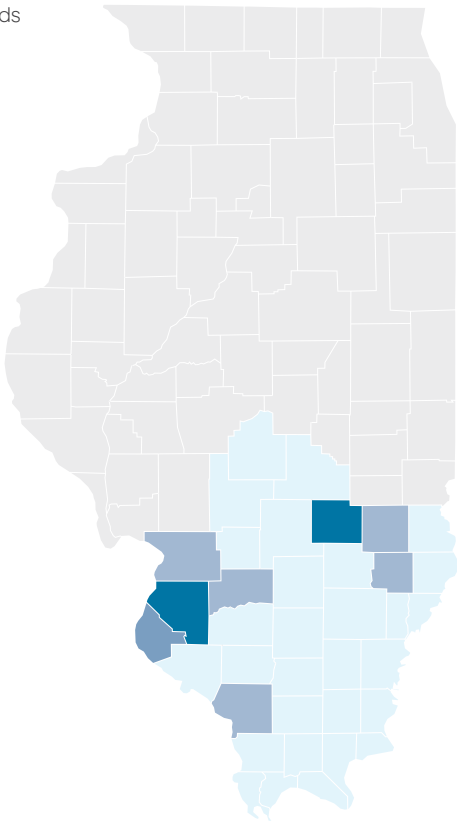
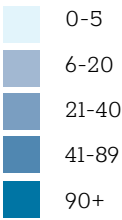
RACE/ ETHNICITY	PERCENT OF STUDENTS
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.4%
Asian	1.4%
Black/African American	16.2%
Hispanic	8.1%
Multiracial	4.5%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0%
White	69.4%
GRAND TOTAL	100%

SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS



REGION 5

Number of Awards



821
TOTAL NUMBER OF APPLICANTS

370
TOTAL NUMBER OF AWARDEES

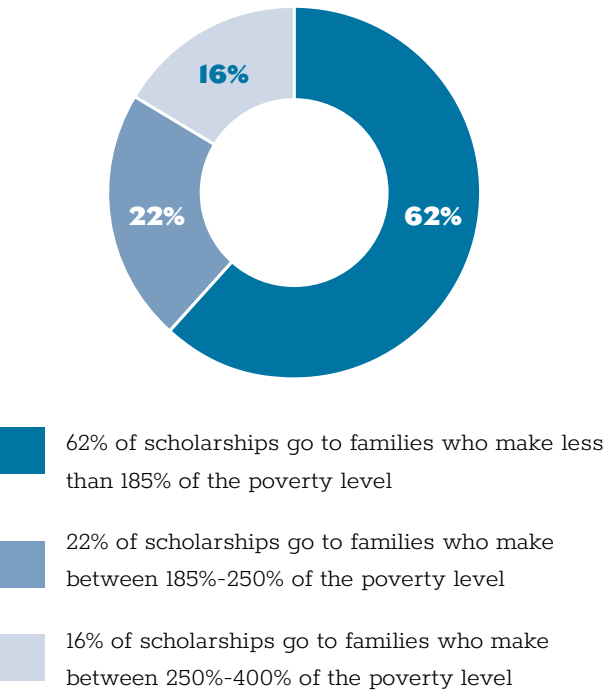
\$1,302,952
DONATED



ETHNIC/RACIAL DEMOGRAPHICS

RACE/ ETHNICITY	PERCENT OF STUDENTS
American Indian or Alaska Native	1.6%
Asian	0.3%
Black/African American	11.7%
Hispanic	4.9%
Multiracial	2.4%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0%
White	79.1%
GRAND TOTAL	100%

SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS



DONOR ADVISED SCHOLARSHIPS

RISE SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

Designed to support students and families who otherwise would not have the opportunity to attend private school, the RISE Scholarship Program provides students with financial assistance up to \$5,000 per school year, if they qualify for the Federal Free and Reduced Lunch Program. Participating schools work to promote the RISE Scholarship opportunity and select qualifying students. Scholarship funding is generously provided and designated

by anonymous donors who believe in expanding private school options to new students. Critical to expanding education opportunities, the RISE Scholarship program also cultivates school-based advocacy. This scholarship and advocacy-integrated model connects students as well as schools with the community and governmental leaders who can learn from the students' experience to advance and scale policy innovation kids need and deserve.



335

scholarships



51

schools



\$744,281

in scholarships



\$28,962

average family income,
family of four



136

scholarships



10

schools



\$282,670

in scholarships



\$26,324

average family income,
family of four

UNITED IN LOVE (UIL)

Designed to support students who applied for a tax credit scholarship this year and did not receive one, the United in Love Scholarship provides students with a scholarship equal to their qualifying tax credit scholarship. Schools

identify students who may be in need of emergency funds or facing severe financial hardship. Scholarship funding is generously provided and designated by anonymous donors who seek to provide students with educational stability.

EMPOWER FAMILIES

When asked to indicate how well their child's experience matched with why they applied for the program,

98%
OF FAMILIES INDICATED
'EXTREMELY WELL' OR
'VERY WELL'.

Of families who were entering a private school directly from a public school,

97%
OF FAMILIES INDICATED
'EXTREMELY WELL' OR
'VERY WELL'.

Of families who were entering a private school directly from a public charter school,

89%
INDICATED 'EXTREMELY
WELL' OR 'VERY WELL'.

FAMILY STORIES

STACY M.

We were blessed with the Empower Illinois scholarship this year. My son went from hating school to almost getting off his IEP because of the wonderful teachers at CLS! He is thriving at this school and it's amazing!! I'm thankful for everyone who helped make this possible. 100% advocate for school choice.

BEATRICE M.

Prior to receiving the award, my husband and I were certain we would not be able to afford the school of our choice. To make matters worse, our lives were turned upside down in mid-August when my mother, husband and I tested positive for COVID-19. Unfortunately, my mother passed away as a result of the illness. Things have not been easy. With your support, the boys are able to take advantage of in-person learning. We are blessed to have them in a faith-based school to help them emotionally during these challenging times. Thank you Empower Illinois! Thank you generous donors!

ADREAIN B.

I am a mom of 7-year-old twin girls. Thanks to Empower Illinois they have been able to attend school for the past two years on full scholarships. Our family is so grateful. This year, especially in these difficult times, Empower Illinois has helped to bring a sense of normality to children who don't understand why they can't play with their friends or go to the playground.

DAVID Z.

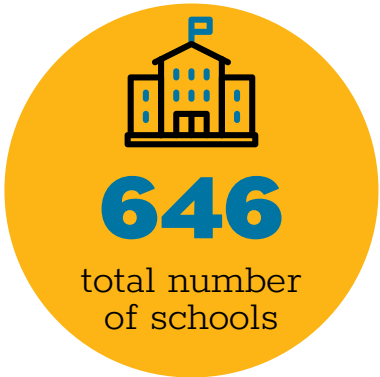
My wife and I always wanted to be able to send our children to a school based on our religious beliefs and that had a safe environment, but unfortunately we found ourselves having to choose between paying our mortgage or sending them to the school we wanted. Thanks to the Empower Illinois Scholarship, we don't have to fall behind on our mortgage payments anymore.

CALEB C.

I am currently a junior at St. Ignatius College Prep and I live in East Garfield Park. I received a partial scholarship, but freshman year my mom still struggled to pay the tuition of my school, so we applied for a tax credit scholarship. Since then, Empower Illinois has been able to relieve a burden my mom endured while allowing me to remain at the school I enjoyed attending every day since 2017. At Ignatius I am a part of the theatre troupe, run track and take part in a multitude of interesting clubs. All of this wouldn't be possible without the assistance of the tax credit scholarships.

EMPOWER SCHOOLS

EMPOWER ILLINOIS IS FORTUNATE TO PARTNER WITH **92%** OF PRIVATE SCHOOLS IN ILLINOIS TO OFFER APPLICANTS DIVERSE, QUALITY EDUCATION OPTIONS.



STUDENTS APPLIED TO **617** SCHOOLS ACROSS THE STATE

Average of



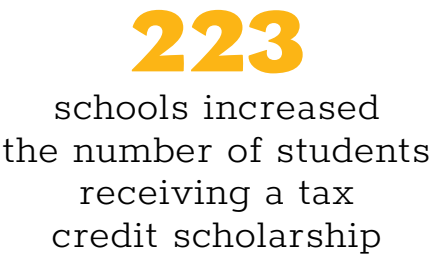
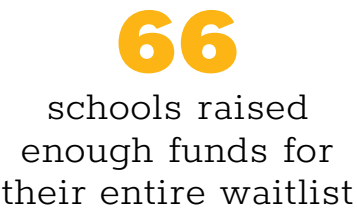
applicants
to a school

Average of



awardees
to a school

SCHOOL DEMOGRAPHICS



INTERNATIONAL
MONTESSORI
SOCIAL JUSTICE
SCIENCE INDEPENDENT
CHRISTIAN BILINGUAL ISLAMIC
ARTS CATHOLIC GREEK
BAPTIST JEWISH ORTHODOX
GIFTED LUTHERAN BOARDING
COLLEGE PREP SECULAR

EMPOWER DONORS

EMPOWER ILLINOIS IS PROUD TO HAVE A BROAD BASE OF DONOR SUPPORT.

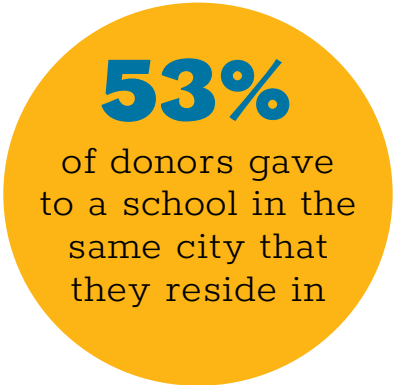
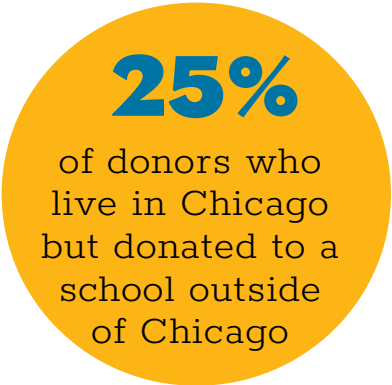
Donations are not just from major donors, but also made by Illinoisans from diverse backgrounds who want to support their local students, schools and communities.



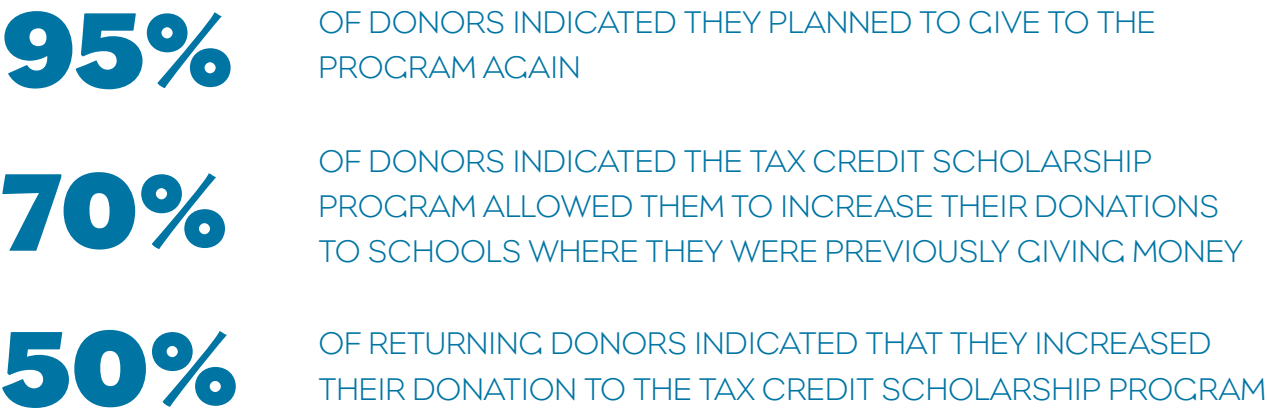
\$10,282
average
donation

\$3,000
median
donation
(53% of donors \$3,000 or less)

\$1,000
most common
donation
(16% of donors gave \$1,000)



SURVEY DATA



Matching gift challenges spark involvement and typically result in extremely successful school-based fundraising.

MATCHING GIFT PROGRAMS

EMPOWER ILLINOIS IS COMMITTED TO EMPOWERING SCHOOLS IN THEIR LOCAL FUNDRAISING AND DONOR DEVELOPMENT.

Matching gift challenges spark involvement and typically result in extremely successful school-based fundraising. Through partnerships with schools and at the wishes of individual donors, Empower Illinois is proud to have supported five matching gift programs this year, which provided an even greater number of students with scholarships. Individual schools also ran matching gift programs for the Tax Credit Scholarship Program with their donors.

ARCHDIOCESE OF CHICAGO

Kicking off the year, the Archdiocese of Chicago and six donors partnered with Empower Illinois for a 2:1 matching gift challenge. The match sought to engage new donors to the Tax Credit Scholarship Program and raise money early in the year, so families would have early notice about their children's scholarships.

\$2,352,423

RAISED

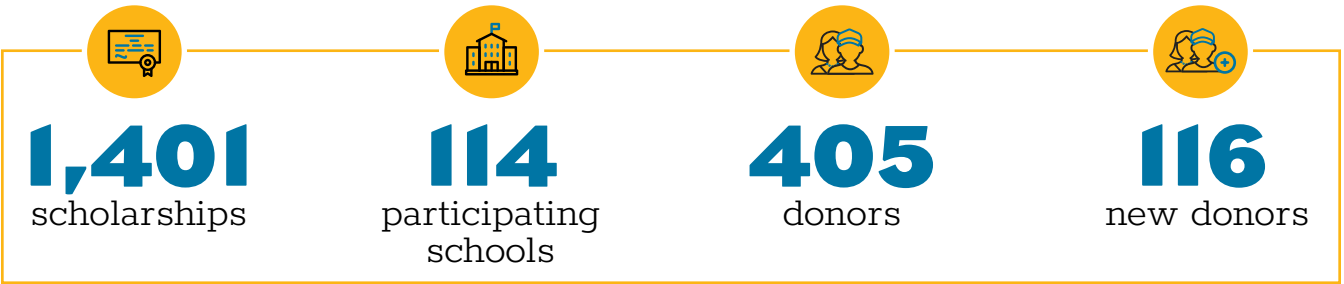
\$239,409

EXCEEDED AVAILABLE MATCH

\$4,704,847

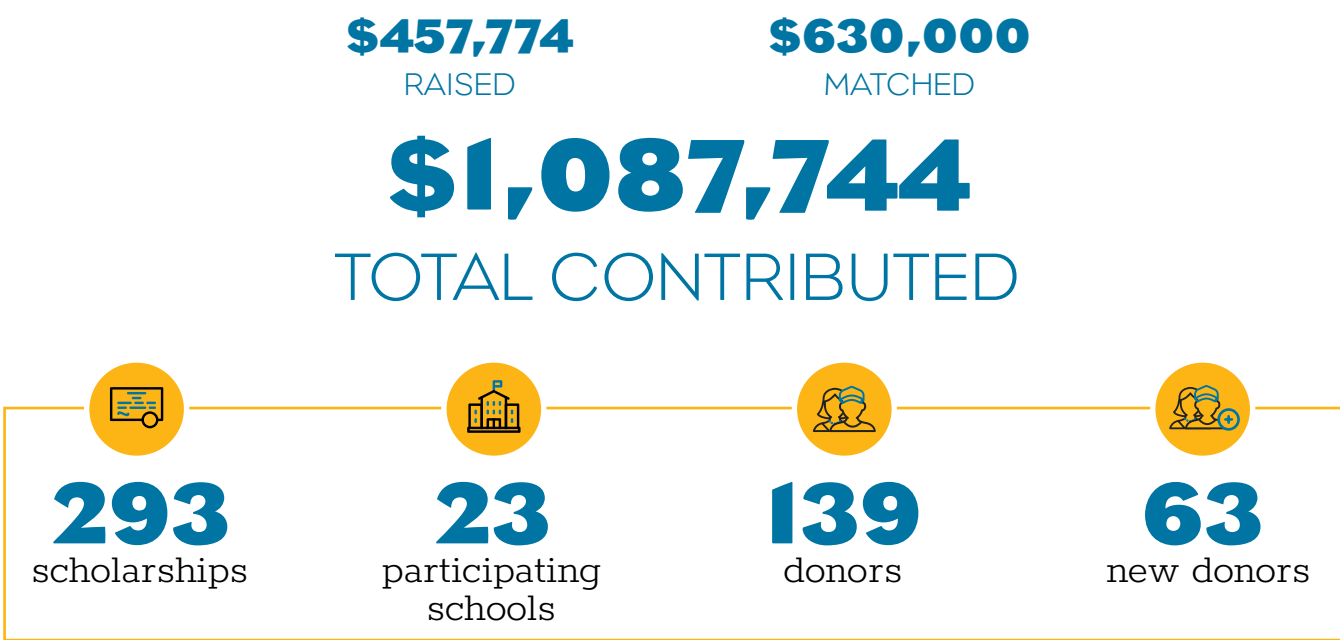
MATCHED

\$7,296,680
TOTAL CONTRIBUTED



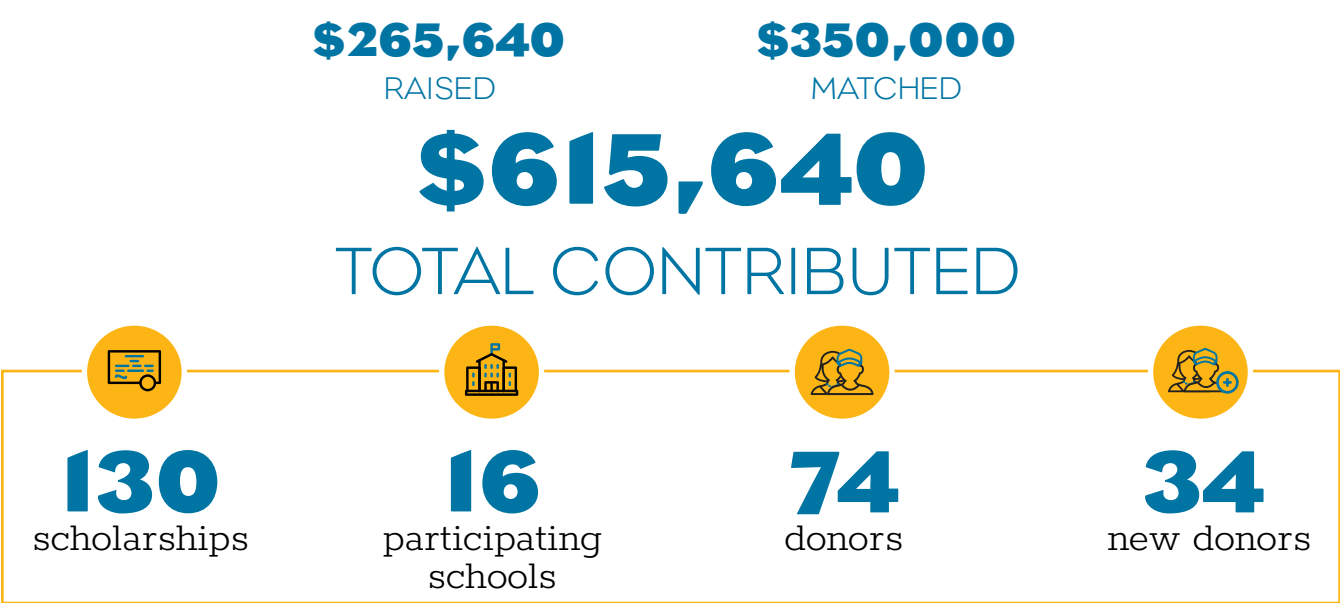
SCHREIBER FAMILY

In the spring of 2020, John and Kathy Schreiber sponsored a matching challenge for select Catholic schools in Regions 4 and 5. The match strategically engaged previously funded schools to cultivate their independent development skills and grow a new donor base.



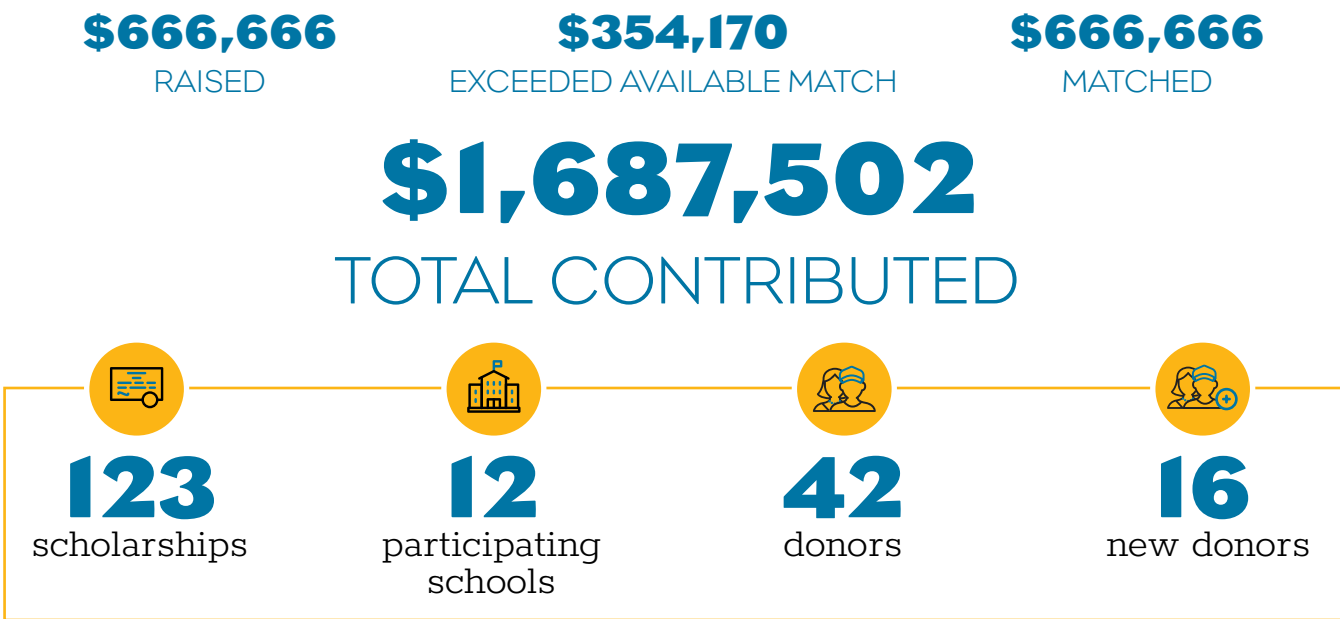
DIOCESE OF JOLIET

In the fall of 2020, a generous donor sponsored a matching gift challenge for the Diocese of Joliet. For new donors to Empower Illinois and the Tax Credit Scholarship donation process, donations were matched 2:1. Returning Tax Credit Scholarship donors received a match of 1:1 on their gifts. These 18 schools had 45 days to grow their donations through the matching gift opportunity. This match helped the Diocese end the year with dozens of additional scholarships.



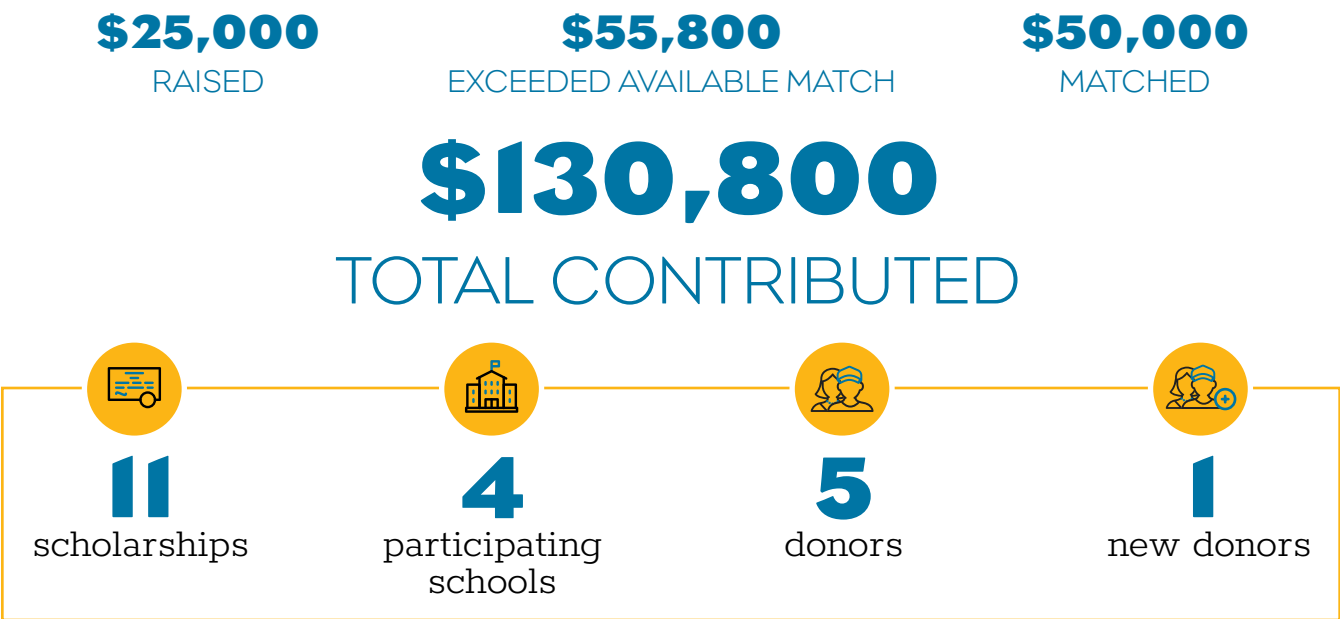
LAKE MICHIGAN ASSOCIATION OF INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS (LMAIS)

In the summer of 2020, a generous donor sponsored a 1:1 matching gift challenge for high quality, independent schools. The LMAIS schools worked to leverage the opportunity to engage their school communities in raising significant scholarship donations.



BLACK EDUCATION EXCELLENCE (BEE) INITIATIVE

With the launch of Empower Illinois' new BEE Initiative, a generous donor was motivated to bring additional scholarship funding to kids and schools in the BEE network. This 2:1 match saw amazing support, with the total match cap being hit in less than one week.



EMPOWER ADVOCACY

ENGAGING COMMUNITIES AND EMPOWERING THE VOICES OF FAMILIES, KIDS, AS WELL AS EDUCATORS DRIVES EMPOWER ILLINOIS' WORK.

Our team recognizes that those most impacted by the life-changing potential of a tax credit scholarship must be central to any discussion about the program's impact

and future. We are proud to have supported these critical perspectives through community nights, messages to legislators, and op-eds published across the state.

3,312

**LETTERS WRITTEN TO
ILLINOIS LEGISLATORS**

5,125

**LETTERS WRITTEN TO
FEDERAL LEGISLATORS**

2,996

**ADVOCATES CONTACTED THEIR
ILLINOIS LEGISLATORS**

94%

**OF ILLINOIS LEGISLATORS
REACHED BY ADVOCATES**

8

**ADVOCATE OP-EDS
PUBLISHED**



EMPOWER POLICY AND RESEARCH

RESEARCH:

THE FUTURE OF ILLINOIS: WORKFORCE SYSTEM ALIGNMENT LANDSCAPE REPORT

An expansion of the *Invest in Kids Act* would provide the opportunity for students to take part in quality workforce education programs led by industry and the skilled trades. Partnering with the Untapped Potential Project and the Illinois Economic Policy Institute, Empower Illinois

co-authored a comprehensive report on Illinois' workforce development and education systems and their alignment with the needs and demands of the industry.

THE REPORT EXPLORED A FEW KEY TOPICS:

- 1

Misalignment between employer skill needs and employee skills to meet that need in Illinois
- 2

Workforce challenges experienced in the state
- 3

Historic struggles to increase diversity within the skilled trades
- 4

Previous efforts by Illinois' community college and K-12 public school systems in addressing the state's workforce education needs

Empower Illinois has taken these findings and built a policy that will allow a direct relationship between Illinois employers and skilled trade unions and the workforce of the future. By creating scholarship opportunities through the *Invest in Kids Act*, high school students can take

part in workforce education programs led by industry and skilled trade partners. These opportunities will, importantly, be aligned to a career pathway with a family-sustaining wage and identified by the state as being in-demand.

RESEARCH:

BUILDING RESILIENT SCHOOLS: THE STATE OF NEXT GENERATION LEARNING IN ILLINOIS

The COVID-19 pandemic shone a bright light on Illinois' education system's arcane practices that limit the ability for schools and school leaders to expand learning opportunities and access beyond the four walls of a concrete classroom. Empower Illinois, in partnership with the Foundation for Excellence in Education, commissioned

a forthcoming research report, which will serve as a landscape analysis. The report will explore state policies and regulations that will allow us to understand where barriers and opportunities exist and how they might provide for broader adoption of next-generation learning opportunities for students and educators.

POLICY:

EMPOWER OPPORTUNITY IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Empower Illinois' work to increase opportunity and quality in Illinois' public schools has been at the core of the organization's work since its founding. Two statewide laws now exist as a direct result of Empower's work to increase opportunity: The Untapped Potential Act and The Accelerated Placement Act.

POLICY:

CLOSING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

2020 brought many challenges for Illinois' public school system with the COVID-19 pandemic forcing schools to shutter their physical doors and move students online. Empower Illinois worked with policy advocates across the country to support closing the digital divide by investing in broadband connectivity in rural and underserved areas of the state as well as device purchasing technology so students could participate in learning regardless of their family's ability to purchase a laptop or tablet.

2020 GOALS

EXPAND TAX CREDIT SCHOLARSHIPS

PROGRESS:

Not only did Empower Illinois and its partners successfully hold back a premature cap and cut of the Tax Credit Scholarship Program in 2019, but the community has supported more than 15,000 scholarships in just three years. Each year, the total number of scholarships has exceeded the single year number of scholarships (5,459 scholarships) when we set this goal. Our team is proud to have been able to offer life-changing scholarship opportunities to thousands of students.

EXPAND INNOVATION AND SCHOOL GROWTH

PROGRESS:

Over the past year, Empower Illinois and its partners in the Future of Illinois coalition have expanded the group's members to include 47 trade organizations, hundreds of schools, and dozens of community organizations. Together, this group published key research highlighting the need for and the opportunity to support career and technical education opportunities for kids who need it the most. We remain committed to ensuring this innovative school model can serve low-income and working-class families.

GROW RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS

PROGRESS:

Last year, Empower Illinois launched the Research Education Partnership, and this year we founded additional ways to expand our research footprint with a focus on career and technical education as well as educational information. In May, the Future of Illinois report catalogued existing CTE programs and workforce pathways, as well as the gaps in program participation, particularly among marginalized communities. This research helped inform policies expanding these opportunities. Our research also expanded to explore education innovation and our team will bring this information to educators in early 2021.

GROW DONOR ADVISED SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMS AND MATCHING GIFT OPPORTUNITIES

PROGRESS:

With more than 470 scholarships awarded and over \$1,000,000 raised through Donor Advised Scholarships, our team is proud to have met this goal. Each year, the RISE and UIL programs have grown in both donations and impact. Moreover, with the addition of the BEE Initiative match this year, our team has also grown matching gift opportunities. In total, matching gift programs funded 1,958 scholarships and raised more than \$6.1 million.



THANK YOU DONORS

TAX CREDIT SCHOLARSHIP DONORS

Thank you to our Tax Credit Scholarship donors championing education opportunities for all kids. Your commitment has increased access to quality education for kids who need it most and has transformed thousands of lives.

EMPOWER ILLINOIS PROGRAM AND OPERATIONS DONORS

Thank you to our charitable donors. Your generosity has funded the policy creation and advocacy activities that make sweeping educational change possible. Empower Illinois' research, innovative technology and grassroots organizing would not be possible without your support.

Jeff Aeder
Anonymous
Peter and Beth Bensen
Charles and Mary Anne Bobrinskoy
CME Group Foundation
Brad and Ann Couri
Kent and Elizabeth Dauten
Mary and Paul Finnegan
Mark and Mary Hoppe
Deborah Hicks Quazzo Charitable Fund
Robert and Patricia Huffman
Michael and Lindy Keiser
Chris and JoAnn Killackey
Vincent Kolber
Harry and Julie Kraemer

Charles and Ellen Mulaney
Chandni and Vijen Patel
Jim and Molly Perry
Patrick G. and Shirley W. Ryan Foundation
Jessica Sarowitz
Josh Scheinfeld
John and Kathy Schreiber
Timothy and Susanne Sullivan
Tracy Family Foundation
Chris and Tasha Wallace
Walton Family Foundation
Donald Wilson





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