



# YEAR TWO REPORT

2019

**BIG DREAMS.  
BOLD THOUGHTS.**





Dear Friends,

Children only get one chance at a quality education, and in 2019, thanks to our partnership with you and with thousands of others across Illinois, we were able to overcome opposition and expand access to life-changing education. I am excited to share this 2019 Annual Report with you because, more than anything, it highlights the stories of kids and families whose **lives have been changed by quality education options**, and of the advocates who have made those options possible.

These pages that follow are full of facts and figures—numbers that clearly show the demand and the impact of the Tax Credit Scholarship Program, and just how much we have accomplished together in such a short time. We are especially proud to showcase our new technology platform—the EmpowerXChange—that handled over 40,000 students who were in line to receive a tax credit scholarship, and most importantly, was built with **our commitment to transparency** and to empowering others by providing actionable information at the most local level possible. This new technology was fueled by feedback from the broad coalition and put even more tax credit scholarships **into the hands of families faster**.

2019 was not without challenges. Opponents to the tax credit scholarship program threatened a 50 percent cut and premature phase out of the Invest in Kids Act—the law that makes tax credit scholarships possible—jeopardizing the education options of every child and family who received or was seeking a tax credit scholarship. Thanks to a broad, diverse, and statewide coalition of parents, grandparents, foster parents, teachers, school leaders, donors, and community leaders, the voices of those most in need of quality education options were heard loud and clear in Springfield during the #SaveMyScholarship campaign. These tireless advocates **successfully protected tax credit scholarships** from this substantial threat.

Our powerful coalition of community partners propelled us to explore new policies that would provide **new and innovative education pathways** that prepare young people with the skills they need to succeed in blue-collar and new-collar careers, and to land high-demand, high-wage job placements. We heard loud and clear from school and community leaders, corporate partners, and students themselves that this generation, perhaps more than ever, is seeking and is in need of new education pathways **beyond the college-for-all model** of traditional secondary education.

The stories you will read and the numbers you will see in the following pages are impressive, and show clear signs of the growing demand and vital strength of the Tax Credit Scholarship Program and of the broad Empower Illinois coalition. None of those stories or numbers would exist without your support, without your advocacy, without your partnership. These successes are all of ours to share, and so too is the fight to ensure every child gets their fair chance at a quality education.

Sincerely,



Myles X. Mendoza  
President



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

7	Empower Mission
8	Empower History
11	Empower Leadership
12	Empower 2019
14	Empower Students
24	Empower Families
27	Empower Schools
29	Empower Donors
33	Empower Advocacy
34	Empower Public School Options
35	Empower Policy and Research
36	Empower Vision
38	Thank You Donors



# **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.

Over the years, our team members have devoted themselves to this mission through classroom work, policy research, and scholarship granting. Each of these efforts, over many years and under numerous iterations, has become the core of Empower Illinois.

Knowing Illinois and its students are capable of wondrous things, Empower Illinois has looked for ways to support students further. Empower Illinois identified several areas where we could have a positive impact: 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 to students across diverse 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.

In 2016, working with the Illinois Association for Gifted Children, we advocated for and passed the **Untapped Potential Act**, and in 2017, working again with the same organization, we advocated for and passed the **Accelerated Placement Act**. These accomplishments were hard-fought and won with a small team.

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 that can help make their dreams a reality. In under a year, Empower Illinois went from a three-person policy shop 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 its 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 EDUCATION OPPORTUNITY AND INGENUITY, ALWAYS IN THE SERVICE OF ILLINOIS' CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES.



# EMPOWER LEADERSHIP

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Sara Albrecht  
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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Sara Albrecht, *Chairperson*  
Jeff Aeder  
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Mary Clare Gourley  
Tom Hulsebosch  
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John Kirtley  
Andy McKenna  
Levoyd Robinson  
John Schreiber  
Scott Schuster  
Joe Scoby  
Peter Thompson  
Peter Vilim  
Ed Wehmer  
Mark Wight

## STAFF

Brian Brookover, Senior Director  
of Operations and Finance  
Emma Ciavarella,  
Communications Manager  
Chris Davis, Customer Success Manager  
Kaitlin Donnelly, Managing  
Director of Development  
Justine Gagne, Office Manager  
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Research Director  
Anthony Holter, Executive Director  
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Government Affairs Director  
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Sinthu Ramalingam, Senior  
Policy Associate  
Juan Rangel, Strategy Director  
Julia Sullivan, Communications Assistant  
Bobby Sylvester, Regional Director  
Taylor Zentner, Philanthropic Director

# EMPOWER 2019

## EMPOWERXCHANGE ("EXC") LAUNCH

To support the Fall 2019-Spring 2020 reservation and application, Empower Illinois launched the EmpowerXChange (EXC) portals for schools and families. With custom-built technology and tailored interfaces, the EXC portal offers a user-friendly design that supports thousands of Empower Illinois' stakeholders. Moreover, the EXC platform increases transparency and provides timely data for families and schools.



## APPLICATIONS OPEN & AWARDS MADE

With the new EXC technology, Empower Illinois opened applications for Year Two. Within 24 hours, 36,981 kids reserved their place in line. By the end of the year, 46,150 kids reserved their spot in line to receive a tax credit scholarship. By February, Empower Illinois awarded its first scholarship for the Fall 2019-Spring 2020 school year.

## FOREFRONT TAX CREDIT SCHOLARSHIP DEBATE

Forefront hosted a timely and lively conversation that explored the challenges and opportunities posed by Illinois' \$100 Million Tax Credit Scholarship Program. Moderated by Amanda Vinicky of WTTW's "Chicago Tonight," Empower Illinois guests heard from Derrell Bradford, Executive Vice President of 50CAN and Van Schoales, CEO of A+ Colorado.

## #SAVEMYSCHOLARSHIP CAMPAIGN

Throughout the month of May, Empower Illinois joined hundreds of families, school leaders, and community advocates to protect the Tax Credit Scholarship Program from a premature cap and cut. Thanks to the countless advocates who rallied in Springfield and contacted their legislators through the #SaveMyScholarship campaign, the Tax Credit Scholarship Program remained fully intact.

## CHICAGO ACADEMY FOR THE ARTS STUDENT CONTEST

Empower Illinois is proud to support students seeking unique education options, like those provided by Chicago Academy for the Arts. We offered a contest to their students to capture Empower Illinois' mission in visual art, and we were extraordinarily impressed with their creativity and skill. One of the student pieces is featured on the back page of this report.

## 10,000<sup>TH</sup> SCHOLARSHIP AWARDED

Thanks to the generosity of every day Illinoisans who care about quality education options, Empower Illinois awarded its 10,000th scholarship on September 16, 2019. We are humbled and honored to have been able to help so many kids in just two years.

MAY

## YEAR ONE CELEBRATION

As a way to say thank you to our school partners, donors, legislative champions, and tireless advocates, Empower Illinois hosted a celebration to mark the end of a successful first year of the Tax Credit Scholarship Program. We shared the important work this coalition already accomplished and acknowledged the challenges yet to come that we would face together.

JUL

SEP

NOV

## RANKEN SITE VISIT

The Empower Illinois team traveled to St. Louis, Missouri to visit Ranken Technical College and learn about career training opportunities offered at technical schools. Advancing technologies, aging infrastructure, and expected job growth all signal a need for American innovation and career and technical skills. True to its mission, Empower Illinois continues to explore opportunities to expand innovation and quality education options.



# EMPOWER STUDENTS

Total Statewide Dollars Raised:  
**\$111,794,400.02**  
(all time)

Raised by Empower Illinois:  
**\$86,429,355.49**  
(all time)

## OUR IMPACT: 2019 BY THE NUMBERS



Total statewide dollars raised



Raised by **Empower Illinois**



Scholarships

**\$41,263,981.58**  
MILLION RAISED



**95%+**

Directly funds scholarships



**\$6,456**

Average scholarship amount



**432**

Schools receiving awards



**96%**

of eligible private schools partner with EI

**\$35,516.77  
OR 142%**

of the Federal Poverty Level, average family of 4 household income of scholarship recipients



**27,732**

Applicants

**71%**

of scholarships go to families who make less than 185% of the Federal Poverty Level

**18%**

of scholarships go to families who make between 185%-250% of the Federal Poverty Level

**11%**

of scholarships go to families who make between 250%-400% of the Federal Poverty Level

**1**

in

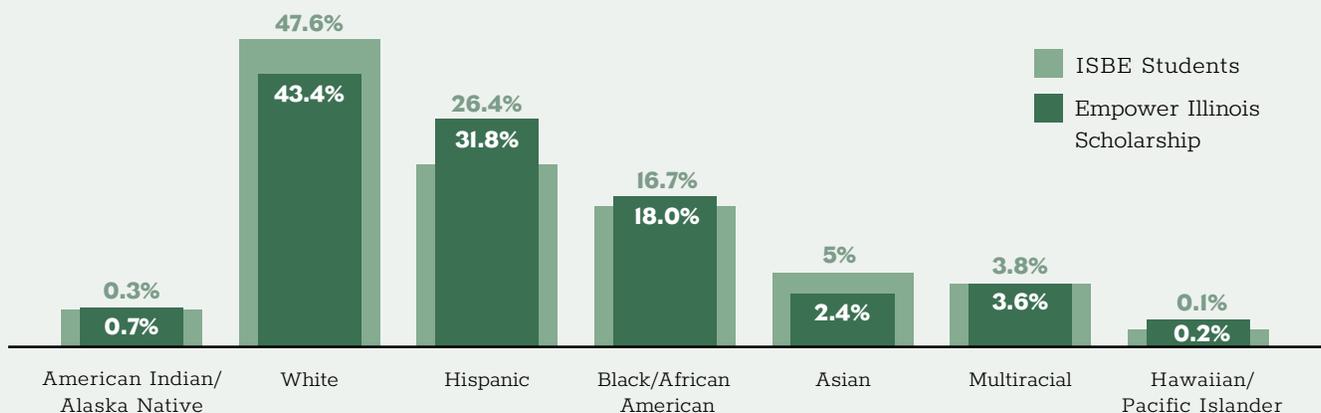
**6**

students have unique learning 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, APPROACHING NEARLY \$300 MILLION. CURRENT FUNDING ALLOWED ONLY 13% OF APPLICANTS TO RECEIVE A SCHOLARSHIP IN THE FALL 2019-SPRING 2020 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 46,150 kids in line for a scholarship can receive an education that best fits their needs.



**46,150**

Kids in line



**\$297,954,818**

Required to fund all kids who want a scholarship



**13%**

Demand met

**73.8%**

of families were seeking a school with higher academic quality

**62.2%**

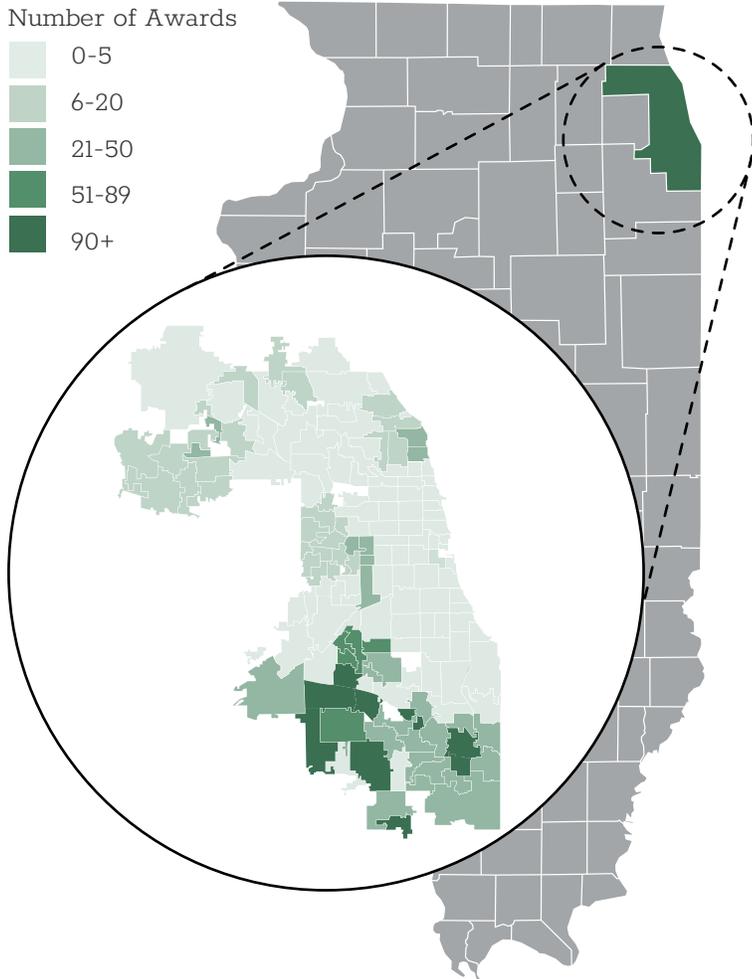
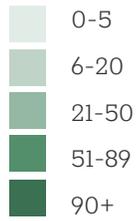
of families were seeking a school with character/values instruction

**54.6%**

of families were seeking a safer school

# REGION 1

Number of Awards



**17,479**  
Applicants

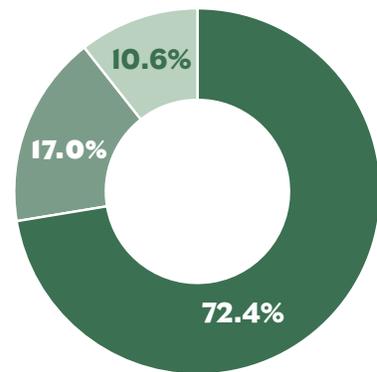


**3,539**  
Awardees



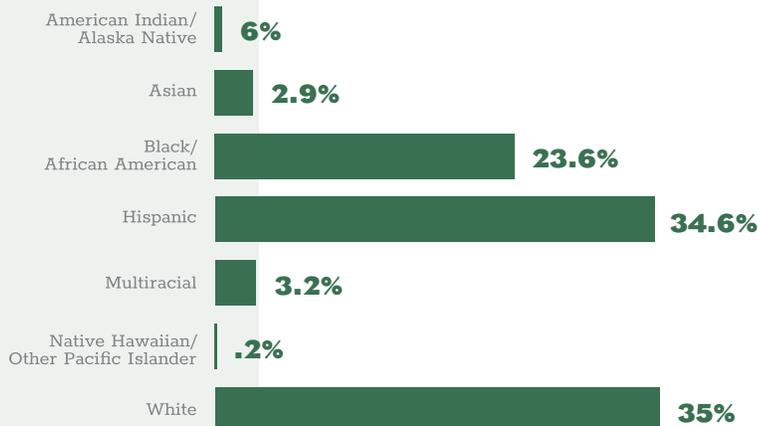
**219**  
Schools

## SES DEMOGRAPHICS



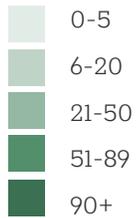
- 72.4% of scholarships go to families who make less than 185% of the Federal Poverty Level
- 17.0% of scholarships go to families who make between 185%-250% of the Federal Poverty Level
- 10.6% of scholarships go to families who make between 250%-400% of the Federal Poverty Level

## ETHNIC/RACIAL DEMOGRAPHICS



# REGION 2

Number of Awards



**5,005**  
Applicants



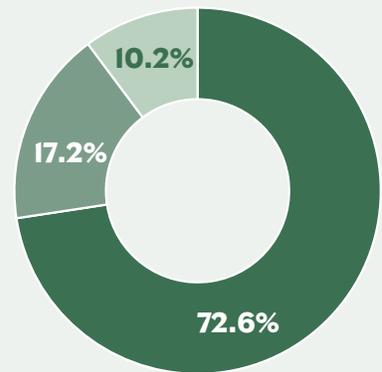
**1,006**  
Awardees



**102**  
Schools

**23.6%**

## SES DEMOGRAPHICS

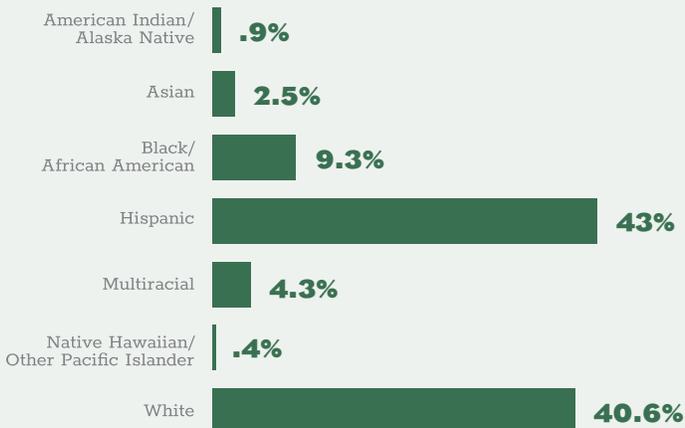


72.6% of scholarships go to families who make less than 185% of the Federal Poverty Level

17.2% of scholarships go to families who make between 185%-250% of the Federal Poverty Level

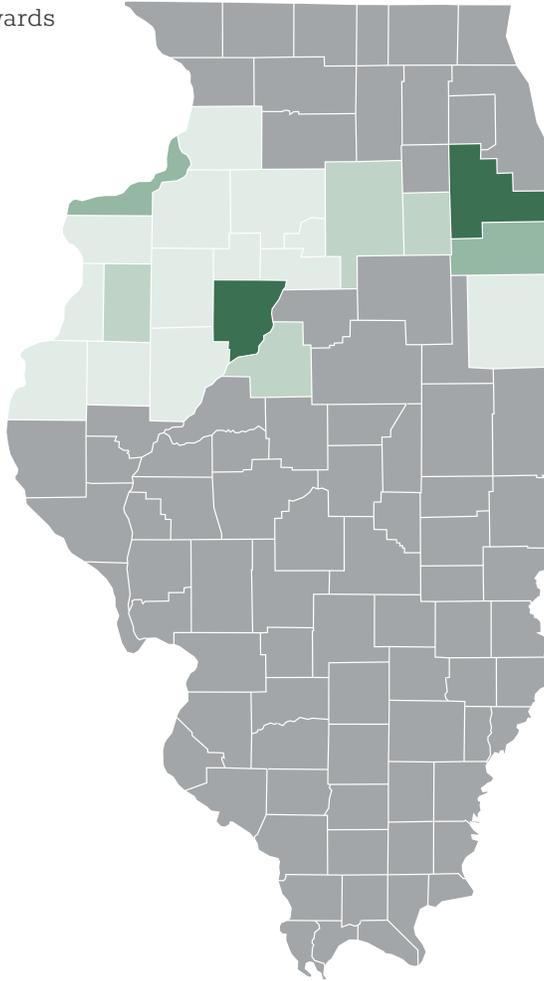
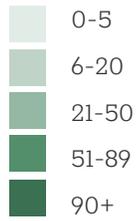
10.2% of scholarships go to families who make between 250%-400% of the Federal Poverty Level

## ETHNIC/RACIAL DEMOGRAPHICS



# REGION 3

Number of Awards



**2,357**  
Applicants

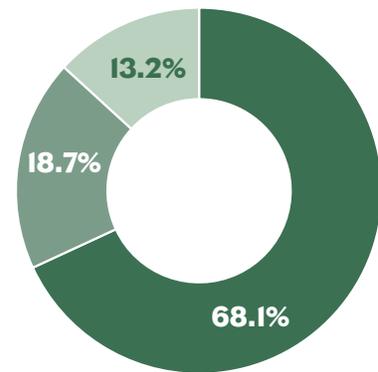


**524**  
Awardees



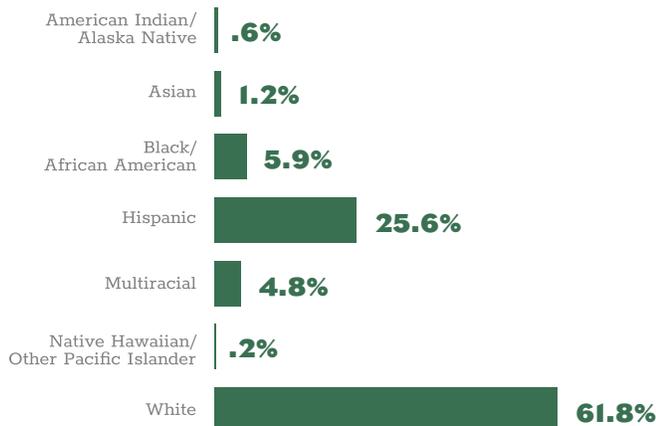
**54**  
Schools

## SES DEMOGRAPHICS



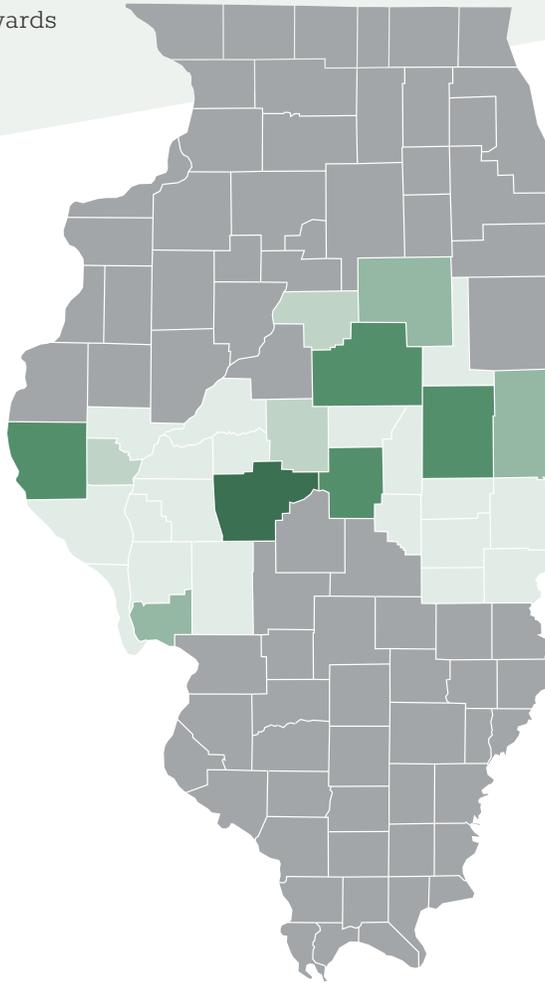
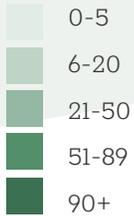
- 68.1% of scholarships go to families who make less than 185% of the Federal Poverty Level
- 18.7% of scholarships go to families who make between 185%-250% of the Federal Poverty Level
- 13.2% of scholarships go to families who make between 250%-400% of the Federal Poverty Level

## ETHNIC/RACIAL DEMOGRAPHICS



# REGION 4

Number of Awards



**1,694**  
Applicants

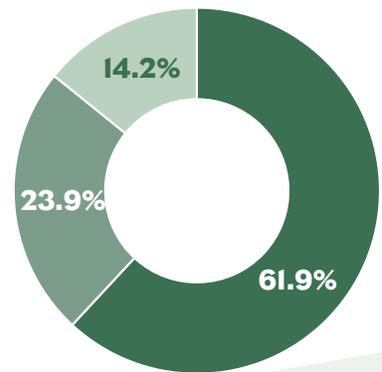


**478**  
Awardees



**38**  
Schools

## SES DEMOGRAPHICS

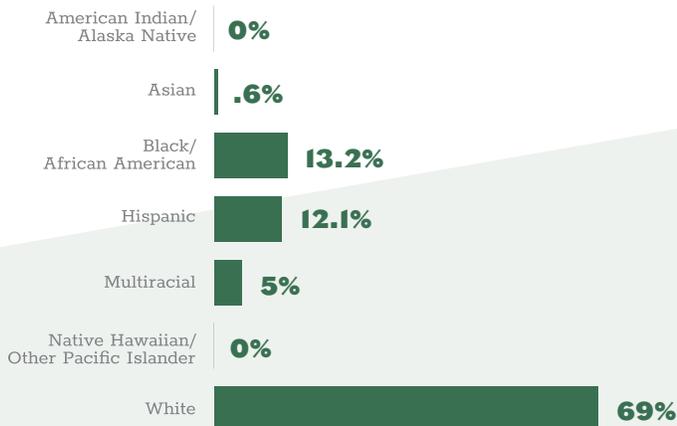


61.9% of scholarships go to families who make less than 185% of the Federal Poverty Level

23.9% of scholarships go to families who make between 185%-250% of the Federal Poverty Level

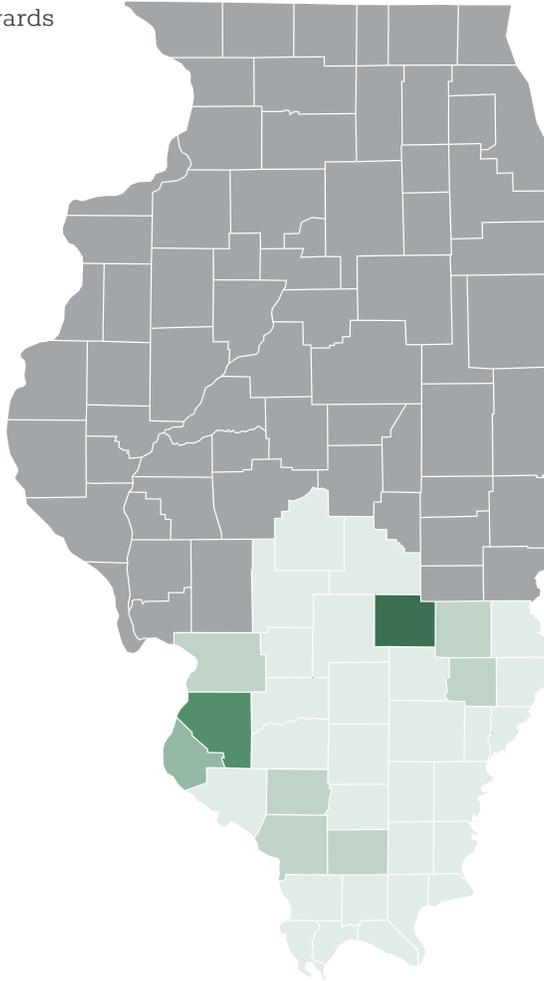
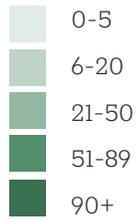
14.2% of scholarships go to families who make between 250%-400% of the Federal Poverty Level

## ETHNIC/RACIAL DEMOGRAPHICS



# REGION 5

Number of Awards



**1,197**  
Applicants

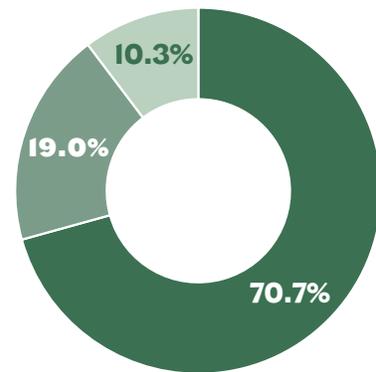


**311**  
Awardees



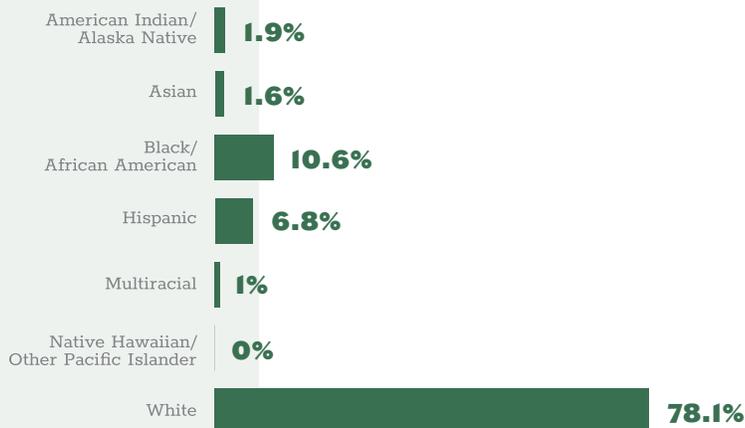
**19**  
Schools

## SES DEMOGRAPHICS



- 70.7% of scholarships go to families who make less than 185% of the Federal Poverty Level
- 19.0% of scholarships go to families who make between 185%-250% of the Federal Poverty Level
- 10.3% of scholarships go to families who make between 250%-400% of the Federal Poverty Level

## ETHNIC/RACIAL DEMOGRAPHICS



# DONOR ADVISED SCHOLARSHIPS

## RISE SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

For low-income and working-class families without a connection to private schools, learning how private schools may best support their child and securing funds to pay for their child is not always easy. Designed to support students and families who otherwise would not have the opportunity to attend private schools, the RISE Scholarship Program provides students with 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 and schools with the community and governmental leaders who can learn from the students' experience to advance and scale policy innovation kids need and deserve.



**248**

Students



**\$656,685.50**

In scholarships



**37**

Schools



**239**

Students  
in K-8



**9**

Students  
in high school



**\$47,638**

Average family  
of four income

# UNITED IN LOVE (UIL)

The Invest in Kids Act's first-come, first-served provision allows new families to access tax credit scholarships every year, leaving some previous scholarship recipients in need of additional assistance. Designed to support students who received a tax credit scholarship

one year, but not the next, the United in Love Scholarship provides students with a scholarship equal to their qualifying tax credit scholarship. Scholarship funding is generously provided and designated by anonymous donors who seek to provide students with educational stability.



**43**

Students



**\$40,875**

Average family  
of four income



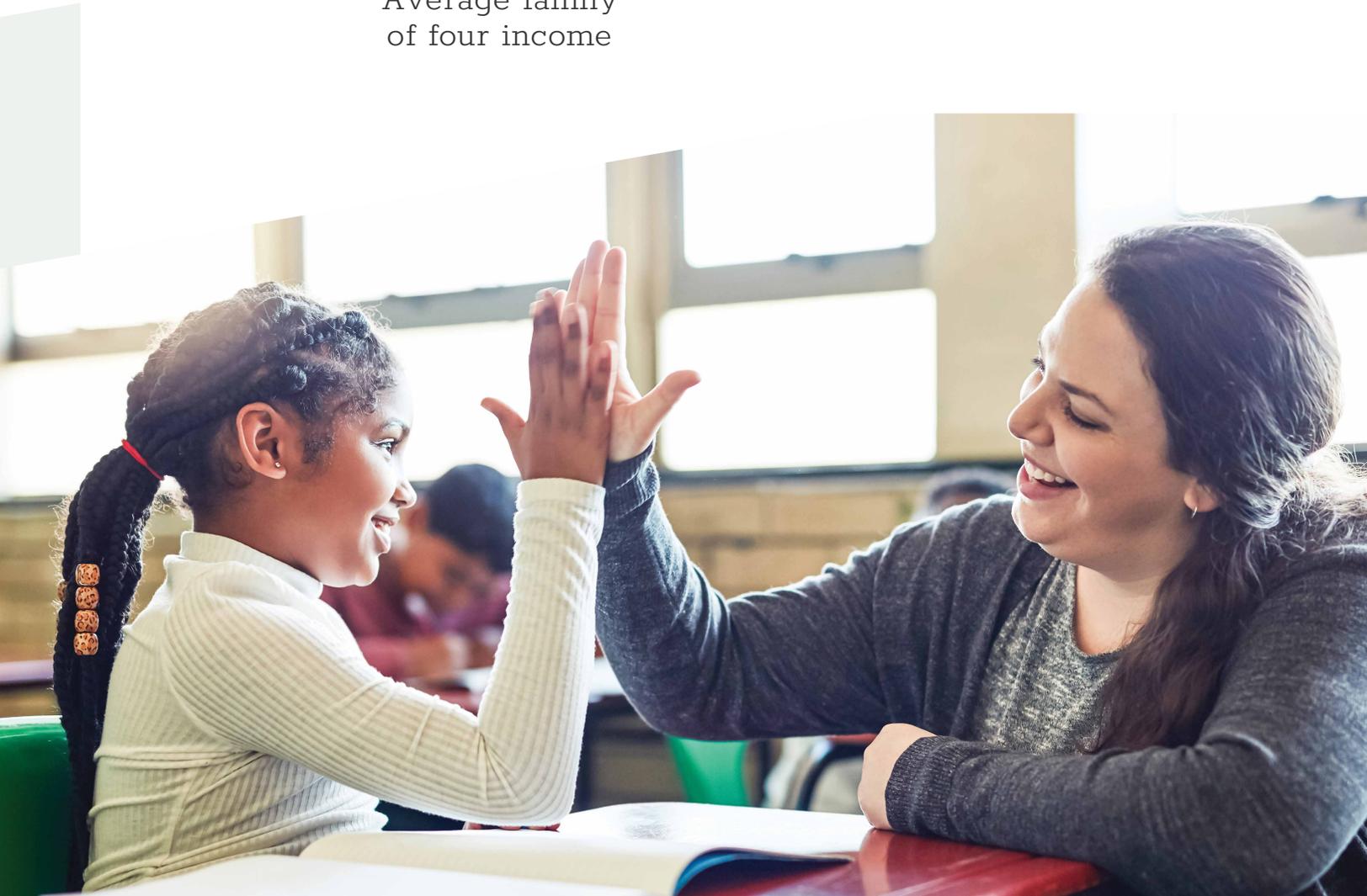
**\$190,000**

In scholarships



**6**

Schools



# EMPOWER FAMILIES

## OUR IMPACT BY THE STORIES

92%

When asked to indicate how well their child's experience matched with why they applied for the program, **92% indicated 'extremely well' or 'very well'**

89.7%

Of those families who were entering a private school directly from a public school, **89.7% indicated 'extremely well' or 'very well'**

91%

Of those families who were entering a private school directly from a public charter school, **91% indicated 'extremely well' or 'very well'**

### Jada O., Student

When I was in the public middle school, it was difficult because I didn't understand the things that they taught. Like in my math class, they taught math one way and I didn't understand it. I would always stress and tell my mom, I can't do this. I can't learn this way. And when I came here, my teachers taught me strategies and other ways to learn how to do the math. Wolcott School really helps because they teach you a variety of ways to help you learn best...People should be very proud when they donate to people who can't afford to go to really good schools—go to schools that would actually help them and take the time to listen and just really take the time out of their day to help students, whether they have a learning difference or not. They make a difference in people's lives. And that if they weren't here giving their money and supporting people like me who need a scholarship to go to a school that really helps them, then none of that would be possible. And they should be very proud, and I will be very thankful for all of those people.”

### Brianna Y., Student

Both my parents came here at a young age. They're immigrants and they wanted something better for us. They wanted something better for their families. Before we started receiving financial aid, my parents were working 15 hours a day, nonstop. So, having the opportunity to receive this scholarship is giving them more time to be with us, which is very great for us, for my siblings and I. We're spending more time with our family. I'm a recipient of a tax credit scholarship, as well as my younger brother. Without that scholarship, we probably would have been going to the local public schools, which aren't as great as my Catholic school is. I feel part of a community. People are welcoming here, and I'm learning values and life lessons that I'll carry on throughout college, my life, high school, everywhere, that are irreplaceable to me. I'm striving to go to an Ivy League school, God willingly, and in college, I would like to become a neonatal physician. My motivation is for my parents. I want to repay them in the future, to do something better for everything that they've given my family.”

### **Jasmine B., Mother**

Jasmine is the mother of three students at St. Patrick Catholic School in Springfield. Two of her kids had attended public schools, but she felt they were just a number, and did not get their needs met. Jasmine attended St. Patrick herself, but could not afford to send her kids to the school she felt was “home” to her.

During the 2019-2020 school year, however, she received a full tuition scholarship for both her older children. This enabled them to afford a school that addresses their special needs, including odd work schedules and low-income. She was also able to send her daughter to dance class, and her son was able to play Little League. Without the scholarships, this would not have been possible. God had His eye on Jasmine’s family.

Jasmine was instrumental in protecting the Invest in Kids Act in the 2019 legislative session, making several trips to the state Capitol. Her story was one of hope and encouragement, as she explained how much the Invest in Kids Act had changed the dynamics of her family’s education.”



### **Theresa G., Mother**

As a single mother of five children, I am forever grateful to Empower Illinois. While my oldest has graduated, my four daughters were in limbo this past school year. My children have attended Catholic schools since they were three years old, but I have to struggled to make ends meet in recent years, and I was concerned I could no longer pay for tuition. I prayed for a miracle everyday. The school district we live in is overcrowded and underperforming, so I knew I would do all I could keep them in Catholic schools, but I did not know if it would be possible. I reluctantly registered them for the fall and within a few weeks I received word of my award from Empower Illinois. I literally cried tears of joy. It was an overwhelming sense of relief to know my children could continue receiving a quality education.”

### **Angela M., Mother**

Without the Empower Illinois scholarship, I would not be able to afford to send my children to a great school. I am a single mother of two children. My son is a junior in high school, in all honor and AP classes. Last year, I qualified for the Empower Illinois scholarship, and it helped me out tremendously! I was finally able to breathe and not have to worry about how I was going to make ends meet. My daughter is in Kindergarten, her father passed away in the beginning of August. With the help of this scholarship, I was able to keep her in the school that I trusted and believed would be the best for her. She is growing, and her teachers are going above and beyond to help make sure she is more than ready for 1st grade. I wouldn’t want to take her from that.”

### **Michael T., Grandfather**

As a single grandparent of two school children it is very difficult to provide them with all the tools and some basic items they require to be healthy and successful. Thanks to this program, my granddaughter is able to attend a school that will help her gain confidence, and the skills she will need. Without the help we have been able to prosper from, I don’t know what we’ll do next year.”

Arts

Baptist

Bilingual

Boarding

Catholic

Christian

College Prep

Cifted

Creek Orthodox

Independent

International

Islamic

Jewish

Lutheran

Montessori

Science

Secular

Social Justice



# EMPOWER SCHOOLS

EMPOWER ILLINOIS IS FORTUNATE TO PARTNER WITH 96% OF PRIVATE SCHOOLS IN ILLINOIS TO OFFER APPLICANTS DIVERSE, QUALITY EDUCATION OPTIONS.



**670**

Partner Schools



**432**

Schools with scholarships



**644**

Schools with applicants

Average

**62**

Applicants per School

Average

**9**

Awardees per School

**\$6,523**

Average tuition

**vs**

**\$6,456**

Average scholarship

**\$10,963,822.82**

For high school students

**\$30,053,466.43**

For K-8 students

## REGION 1

**\$27,961,203.65**

Donations

## REGION 2

**\$7,513,932.96**

Donations

## REGION 3

**\$2,785,281.92**

Donations

## REGION 4

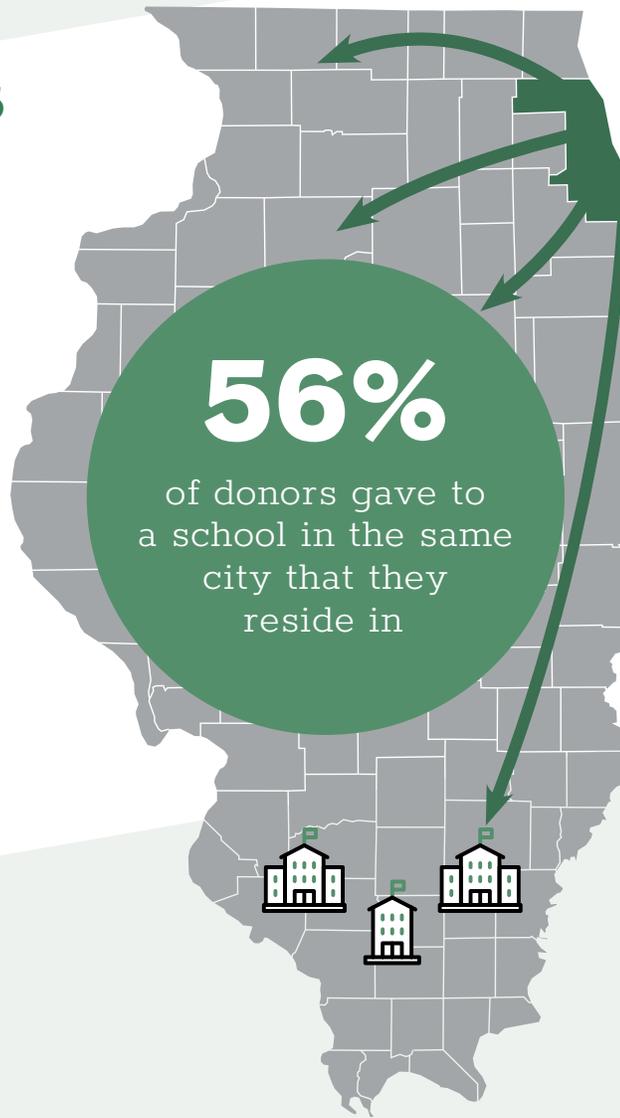
**\$1,885,753.05**

Donations

## REGION 5

**\$1,117,810.00**

Donations



**22%**

Individuals who live in Chicago - donated to a school outside of Chicago

**20%**

of donors gave to more than one school or a school system

## SURVEY DATA

**90.4%**

of respondents indicated the Tax Credit Scholarship Program allowed them to increase their donations to schools where they were previously giving money

**95%**

of respondents indicated they planned to give to the program again

# 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, or communities.



**2,596**

Donors



**1,384**

New donors

*Donated to 221 schools across the state*

**\$13,898.28**

Average donation

**\$3,000**

Median donation

*(50% of donors gave \$3,000 or less)*

**\$1,000**

Most common donation

*(15% of donors gave \$1,000)*

## DONOR DEMOGRAPHICS



# MATCHING GIFT PROGRAM

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

Matching gift challenges spark involvement and 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 three matching gift programs this year, which provided an even greater number of students with scholarships.

## ARCHDIOCESE OF CHICAGO

Kicking off the year, the Archdiocese of Chicago and seven 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.

**\$2.43M**  
INDIVIDUAL GIFTS

**\$4.87M**  
MATCHING GIFTS

**\$79k**  
EXCEEDED MATCH

**\$7,391,627.21**  
RAISED



**1,527**  
Scholarships



**118**  
Participating schools



**231**  
Donors



**113**  
New donors

# INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

In the summer of 2019, an anonymous donor sponsored a 1:1 matching gift challenge for high quality, independent schools. These eleven schools

had 45 days to leverage the opportunity to engage their school communities in raising significant scholarship donations.

**\$666,666**  
INDIVIDUAL GIFTS

**\$666,666**  
MATCHING GIFTS

**\$1,333,332**  
RAISED



**131**

Scholarships



**11**

Participating schools



**35**

Donors



**27**

New donors

# SCHREIBER FAMILY

In the spring of 2019, John and Kathy Schreiber sponsored a 3:1 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.

**\$133,375**  
INDIVIDUAL GIFTS

**\$400,125**  
MATCHING GIFTS

**\$112,329**  
EXCEEDED MATCH

**\$645,829.74**  
RAISED



**160**

Scholarships



**9**

Participating schools



**86**

Donors



**76**

New donors



# EMPOWER ADVOCACY

IN 2018, TAX CREDIT SCHOLARSHIP OPPONENTS ANNOUNCED A 50 PERCENT CUT AND PREMATURE PHASE OUT OF THE INVEST IN KIDS ACT—THREATENING MORE THAN 46,000 KIDS IN LINE FOR A SCHOLARSHIP.

This jeopardized all 7,178 scholarship recipients at the time, and immediately denied at least 742 current recipients their chance to receive the education they deserve. By May, the Invest in Kids Act was the only proposed cut in the entire multi-billion-dollar state budget.

Empower Illinois, under the #SaveMyScholarship campaign, led a grassroots coalition to fight against these threats—and we won. Our staff empowered, recruited, and trained a coalition of school leaders and community advocates to maintain a consistent

presence in the Capitol through daily trips. Thanks to the efforts of many students, parents, grandparents, foster parents, teachers, school leaders, and community leaders who made the trip to Springfield to show their support for the program and its preservation, our voices were heard, and we won the fight to save the program.

Empower Illinois was recognized for its work on the #SaveMyScholarship campaign with a national nomination for the Policy Innovation in Education “Eddie Award” for Best Defense.



**3,500**

Letters written  
by advocates



**146**

Schools marched  
to Springfield



**68%**

Of legislators met  
with advocates



**52**

Media pieces



**200+**

Social media mentions

# EMPOWER EQUALITY IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

ALWAYS BELIEVING THAT QUALITY EDUCATION COMES IN MANY FORMS, EMPOWER ILLINOIS CONTINUES TO SUPPORT INNOVATIVE RESEARCH AND POLICY THAT BENEFITS STUDENTS IN BOTH PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SCHOOLS.

## SUPPORTING POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

Empower Illinois has deep roots in the work of expanding quality educational pathways, and equitable access to those pathways outside of the **Invest in Kids Act**. Two of our early legislative successes were both fully implemented in time for the start of the Fall 2019-Spring 2020 school year. The **Untapped Potential Act** requires public school districts to update their gifted and talented student identification and assessment practices. The **Accelerated Placement Act** requires all public school districts to have a policy to allow students to enter school early, enroll in above-grade level classes, or skip

grades. Empower Illinois played a leading role in ensuring all school districts implemented both laws with fidelity, and without delay.

Additionally, Empower Illinois made further inroads in the implementation process of the **Invest in Kids Act** with both the Illinois Department of Revenue and the Illinois State Board of Education. Our key focus was ensuring the rules and regulations met the intent of the law, and that stakeholder groups (families, schools, donors) felt the law was working better than it had in the first year.

# EMPOWER POLICY AND RESEARCH

## EXPANDING WORKFORCE PATHWAYS

In seeking to develop a future policy framework, Empower Illinois commissioned a landscape analysis of workforce education pathways available to students in Illinois and those quality models that exist in other states around the country, knowing that not every student will pursue a college-driven pathway.

The more accessible and flexible educational pathways are for students, the more likely they are to take advantage of those opportunities

and achieve prosperity. Empower Illinois will continue building out a broader policy portfolio that allows further opportunities for low-income and working-class students to access education options currently out of reach.

## EDUCATION RESEARCH PARTNERSHIP

Empower Illinois twice convened a group of economists—including participants from the University of Chicago, Northwestern University, University of Notre Dame, MorningStar, and the Illinois Economic Policy Institute—to begin to think about a new way to approach education research. The fundamental belief is that the current educational research landscape is largely driven through an ideological lens, not necessarily meant

to inform the policy and practice iteration. These convenings served as the initial barometers for the possibilities of a new body of education research rooted in economic mobility and mastery over at least one skill that leads to employment.

# EMPOWER VISION

## 2019 GOAL: **PROTECT AND EXPAND TAX CREDIT SCHOLARSHIPS**

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### PROGRESS:

In 2019, Empower Illinois focused on the former half of this goal when the Tax Credit Scholarship Program was threatened with a premature cap and cut. With diverse, bipartisan support and family and school advocacy, the Empower Illinois coalition protected tax credit scholarships.

### 2020 GOAL:

#### EXPAND TAX CREDIT SCHOLARSHIPS

In 2020, Empower Illinois will focus on the latter half of this goal as we diversify and activate coalition members, and explore legislative, fundraising, and marketing strategies to grow the Tax Credit Scholarship Program.

## 2019 GOAL: **GROW RISE SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM**

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### PROGRESS:

Donor Advised Scholarship Funds, such as the RISE Scholarship Program, allows students attending schools with designated dollars to receive up to \$5,000 for tuition, if they qualify for the Federal Free and Reduced Lunch Program. Empower Illinois is proud to share that in 2019 scholarships and program donors grew, in addition to increased education advocacy at participating schools. Twenty-four schools engaged with their elected officials to share scholarship success stories, and ask their Senators and Representatives to fight for expanded education opportunities. Moreover, Empower Illinois introduced a new program: the United in Love (UIL) Scholarship, designed to support students who may not receive a tax credit scholarship year-over-year. In its inaugural year, UIL welcomed 43 students at 6 schools and awarded \$190,000 in scholarships.

### 2020 GOAL:

#### GROW DONOR ADVISED SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMS

Empower Illinois will continue to renew and grow Donor Advised Scholarship funds, like the RISE Scholarship and United in Love scholarship programs, and work to engage new donors to support more students who otherwise would not have the opportunity to attend private school. Additionally, Empower Illinois will support student, family, and school voices as they advocate for increased education opportunities for all students.

## 2019 GOAL: **MAINTAIN AND EXPAND OUR RESEARCH**

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### PROGRESS:

Empower Illinois bolstered its research this year by launching the Research Education Partnership—a space where university researchers, education, business, and labor policy interests come together with the support of the reform-minded philanthropic community to tackle a collective agenda seeking to redesign K-12 education experiences to improve economic outcomes for students in Illinois and across the United States, but especially the most disadvantaged and disenfranchised.

### 2020 GOAL:

#### BEGIN RESEARCH UNDER THE RESEARCH EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP

In 2020, the Research Education Partnership will begin to study the impact of education experiences on students' economic mobility.

## 2019 GOAL: **SUPPORT TECHNICAL EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES**

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### PROGRESS:

Empower Illinois has spent the past year researching various education models that teach young people the skills they need to secure high-demand, high-wage careers, and in particular the impact these opportunities can have on students for whom college is not the right fit. Committed to education options for all kids, Empower Illinois—along with private labor organizations, community groups, technology partners, and thought leaders—spearheaded the development and growth of the Future of Illinois initiative. This new initiative seeks to develop free, private, blue-collar to new-collar trade high schools that will provide students an excellent technical education and a pathway to prosperity.

### 2020 GOAL:

#### EXPAND INNOVATION AND SCHOOL GROWTH

Throughout 2020, the Future of Illinois coalition will work to expand innovation in education options, grow career and technical education opportunities, and increase access to these options for low-income and working-class kids.

# THANK YOU DONORS

## TAX CREDIT SCHOLARSHIP DONORS

Thank you to our Tax Credit Scholarship donors for being champions of expanding education opportunities. Your generosity has made quality education options a reality for thousands of Illinois' children.

## 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 achievable. Empower Illinois' advocacy and outreach is not possible without your support.

Anonymous

Anonymous

Alliance for School Choice

Peter and Beth Bensen

Rita and John Canning

James and Catherine Denny Foundation

Mary and Paul Finnegan

Marge and Ward Hamm

Tom and Nancy Hulsebosch

Michael and Lindy Keiser

The Logos Charitable Fund Inc.

Bill McIntosh

Charles and Ellen Mulaney

The Networking Group

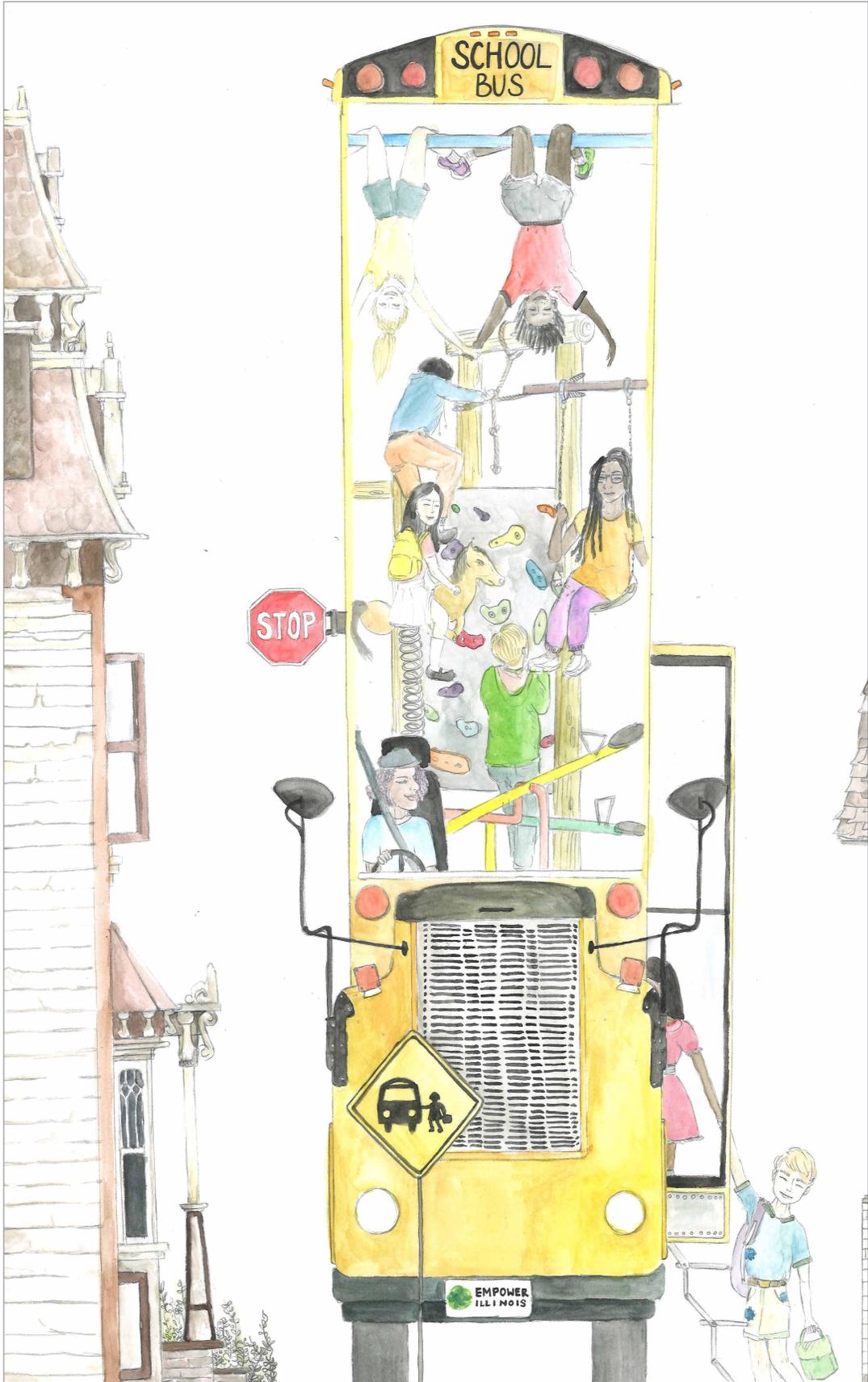
Jim and Molly Perry

John and Kathy Schreiber

Tracy Family Foundation

Walton Family Foundation





"Intersection" by Amy Li



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