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the NEWSSTAND

THE OCCASIONAL PUBLICATION FOR PERSISTENT EDUCATION FRIENDS

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FEDERAL TAX CREDIT SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM: OPT IN TO FIGHT BACK!

For months, Democrat governors have been waiting for federal regulations before deciding whether to participate in the new Federal Education Tax Credit. We thought that was smart to wait for the fine print… which was supposed to come out in June… then we heard July… then September… And they were finally released October 1!

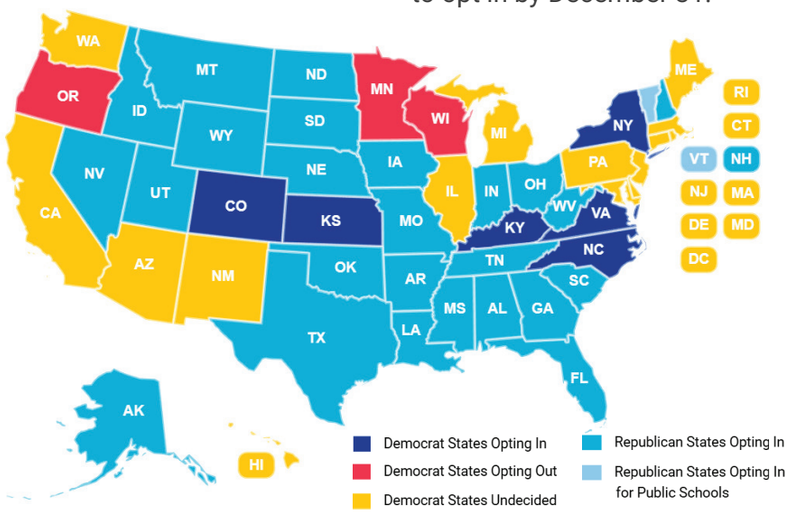
Backing up a step, the Federal Education Tax Credit is already federal law and every U.S. taxpayer can participate, whether or not Illinois opts in. The law allows taxpayers to divert $1,700 of their federal tax liability to a scholarship organization. The question before us is whether Illinois students can access these resources.

STATES ***CANNOT*** OPT OUT THEIR TAXPAYERS— ONLY THEIR STUDENTS.

Summary of the Program

It is hard to overstate the potential of the federal education tax credit to funnel hundreds of millions – perhaps billions – of dollars to support public school students in accessing tutoring, enrichment, after-school programs, summer learning, and other supports. The range of potential funds varies so greatly because it all depends on how organized we can get; strong partnerships among schools, service providers, scholarship organizations, families, and employers will generate exponentially more funds for students than one-off haphazard efforts.

All Republican-led states have opted in. As of November 5, six Democrat-Governed states will participate, either because they are opting in (CO and NY), their predecessor opted in (VA), or their Republican legislatures passed a law (KS, KY, and NC). If Illinois students are going to participate, Gov. Pritzker needs to opt in by December 31.



Summary of the Regulations

In short, nothing in the regulations is likely to sway supporters or opponents to the other side.

States cannot restrict which Scholarship Granting Organizations (SGOs) qualify, but SGOs themselves have broad flexibility to define their mission and narrow their focus. New SGOs will also have more flexibility than expected, which is good for public schools because new SGOs are forming to support public schools that have not traditionally participated in this sort of structure. Finally, schools in low-income areas will have a "safe haven" to enroll students in tutoring and special needs services without verifying family income.

Why Opting In Is Fighting Back

It may not be the prevailing narrative, but opting in can be a powerful tool to redirect federal resources back to Illinois students. This federal administration has kicked our citizens off of Medicaid, our immigrant neighbors out of their homes, our families off food assistance, and our young learners out of preschool, while doubling down on record-setting ICE spending to terrorize our people in the streets.

When Illinois taxpayers are presented with the option to give $1,700 to the failed Trump administration or divert it to public school kids in Illinois,

the kids will win. But only if taxpayers know about it.

Colorado, the first opted-in Democrat-led state, has used its runway strategically to build up infrastructure to direct as many resources as possible to public schools. A statewide SGO will support local schools cut through the red tape, while including an equity fund to get resources to the lowest-funded public schools. Illinois can learn from that model, double down on the commitment to equitable distribution. It could help us make this case and bring in resources for public schools, and use all the powers we have to maximize educational resources: make automatic payroll deductions easy for state employees and pensioners, ask your largest employers to do the same, partner with a state-wide scholarship organization that is aligned with state goals for equity and outcomes, and trumpet from the rooftops that this is a show of our frustration with this administration.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO LIKE THE LAW TO LEVERAGE THE LAW TO RESTORE SOME RESOURCES TO PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS.

A September policy brief outlines more details about how all of the players in the education ecosystem can partner to maximize equity and public school funding.

INTERVIEW WITH THE FILMMAKERS: BEHIND THE SCENES





The upcoming release of Stand for Children's video *"Beyond the Diploma: Paving a Personalized Path for Every Student"* has many of us on the edge of our seats. When we look back at our high school experience, were we fully prepared for life after graduation? Many of us had to learn life lessons as we experienced them, and sometimes we wish we could have known things earlier. Oftentimes, career choice is a major decision high school graduates are expected to make regardless of whether they had any exposure to the work field they chose.

Stand's Marketing and Communications Manager, Karina Donayre, sat down with Stand's national videographer, Curley Johnson, and Government Affairs Director, Aimee Galvin, to get the scoop on the new video, filmed in September. The project took the team from Collinsville to Aurora with a mission to capture why career exploration, early college opportunities, and a strong sense of student belonging matters for high school success.

Karina: Curley, before we get into specifics, tell us how you got into a career in filmmaking.

Curley: It's an interesting connection because entering video work is essentially entering a trade, and our video speaks a lot to the importance of giving students multiple pathways, not just college. Other than shop class, that idea didn't exist when I was in school. I finished the four-year college path still unsure of my career, and only then discovered film and video. I had to piece together my start through boots-on-the-ground, almost apprentice-like experiences. Looking back, I wish they had offered a high school pathway in video and media. It would have really helped me back then.

Karina: It's interesting to look back at our own personal experiences and see where we could've had more support and access to career exploration. Aimee, what is high school success and how does it connect to career exploration?

Aimee: Wow! Such a big question right off the bat! Well, when we think of high school success, we think of a high school experience that fully prepares all students for life after graduation, regardless of the pathway they choose. Some students might want to go directly to a 4yr university; others might want to go into the trades or earn a credential at a community college. The goal should be to create an experience that allows all high school students the opportunity to gain knowledge, experiences, and skills they need to succeed after graduation.

Karina: That's a complex topic to capture, and it sounds like Illinois alone has diverse experiences when it comes to career exploration in high school. How did you capture all of these different stories into one video?

Curley: This is one of the longest videos I've done for Stand for Children because we had so many great voices to share their experiences. It's also a topic we can all relate to. Everyone has had to think seriously about what we want to do with our lives. The video follows that journey, from kids wanting to be ballerinas to high school students graduating with real work experience, and we also hear from the educators who are working hard to create the best paths for them. My hope is that we captured not only how important career exploration is to our students' education, but that it's crucial that Illinois fully supports and expands these programs.

Karina: Hearing from the students and professionals was such an inspirational aspect of the video, but you also captured many different programs, high schools, and career centers throughout Illinois. How did you choose which programs to highlight for this video?

Aimee: Actually, that was a hard task I had to finish before any filming took place. Throughout my years working with Stand, I've had

abundant opportunities to connect and meet many instructors, superintendents, CTE directors, and advocates who really made the most of their resources to ensure their students received the support they needed for career exploration. Sadly, these are outliers. High school career exploration in Illinois is not the same across the board, and that means resources are also not distributed or equally accessible to everyone. We decided to be strategic about who and what programs we capture, because this is what education advocates had to build to fill in the gaps of career exploration in their communities. While these are great programs to highlight, we also wanted to bring forward the greater need for these programs and the lack of access that many high school students face.

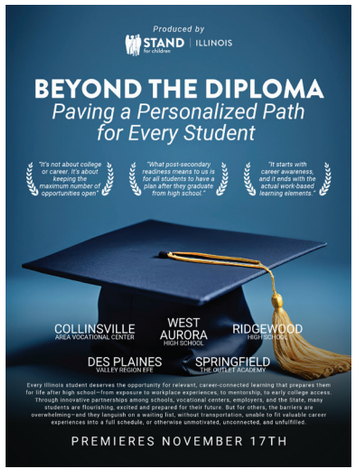
Karina: The video has done a great job of showing what these programs have accomplished even though they are outliers. What final message do you hope your viewers take away from this video?

Aimee: The last point I will make is that we noticed three key elements these programs need to reach more students: funding for program expansion and transportation, flexibility in graduation requirements, and improvement of data and accountability systems that will track how these programs impacted a student's life after graduation and reward schools for the hard work they are putting into graduation readiness. I think with these calls-to-action, we could significantly change the Illinois education system. Anything you'd like to add Curley?

Curley: I think what I love about this work is capturing moments and stories of people from all walks of life and bringing them together for one common message. Hearing directly from motivated and hopeful students and dedicated educators, we get to see beyond the data and requirements. It's the passion of real people that shows us how impactful it can be when all students can find that unique pathway that matches their own interests and skills. At the end of the day, that's what matters most: empowering students to feel prepared and excited for their lives and futures ahead.

Beyond the Diploma: Paving a Personalized Path for Every Student will be released on November 17, 2026!

Visit Stand's website to watch the full video.





Aimee Galvin
Government Affairs Director
Stand for Children Illinois



Curley Johnson
Senior Video Producer
Stand for Children



ATTENTION LITERACY-FOCUSED ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS!

Literacy & Justice for All

Over the past decade, Illinois has made important progress in literacy policy. Through the work of advocates, educators, and policymakers, the state has adopted a comprehensive literacy framework, strengthened educator preparation requirements, established literacy screening resources, and aligned professional development guidance to evidence-based practice.

However, Illinois has not yet made the strategic investments necessary to ensure that all schools can implement this vision with fidelity. Schools are expected to improve literacy outcomes, but many must do so without access to the sustained coaching and improvement supports needed to translate research into classroom practice.

The result is an implementation gap that contributes to persistent achievement disparities across the state.

Thus, Stand for Children and the Illinois Early Literacy Coalition are launching the Illinois Literacy Demonstration Network, designed to demonstrate what is possible when schools receive intensive implementation support grounded in literacy research.

Modeled after the successful Oregon Demonstration Network, the initiative will establish a cohort of elementary schools committed to improving literacy outcomes through implementation of the Center for Early Literacy and Learning Success (CELLS)'s "Literacy Necessities," aligned with the Illinois Comprehensive Literacy Plan. The Oregon model was built around a simple premise: schools are more likely to improve literacy outcomes when educators receive sustained coaching, research-informed professional learning, and structured opportunities to learn from one another. The Illinois Network will replicate this approach, with support from leading literacy researcher and CELLS Director Dr. Nell Duke.

WE INVITE ANY ILLINOIS SCHOOL SERVING GRADE K – 3 TO LEARN MORE ABOUT JOINING THE INAUGURAL COHORT BY FILLING OUT AN INTEREST FORM BY SCANNING THE QR CODE BELOW.

This is a philanthropically-funded project with no cost to schools to participate.

MEET THE TEAM: JOEL GILES



Role at Stand:
Fellow

Hometown:
Chicago, IL, but lived in Indianapolis from 8th–12th grade

Education:
Student at Roosevelt University

Currently Reading:
Skybound
Transformers Comics

Favorite Teacher:
Mr. Bolden. He taught AP Psychology and made an impact on me because he pushed me and helped me understand a subject I didn't understand well beforehand.

Favorite Subject in School:
History

Why Stand for Children?:
They've empowered me and given me the tools to help advocate for my community. I began my advocacy journey with the Stand team in Indiana through the Youth Advocacy Group and asked for an introduction to the Illinois affiliate when I moved for college. I would love to bring more student voices to the work, because students are often an overlooked audience in education policy, even though they are the ones with the most at stake.

STAND for children | ILLINOIS

Stand for Children Illinois
@StandIllinois
@IllinoisStand
stand.org/Illinois

ABOUT STAND FOR CHILDREN

Stand for Children is a unique catalyst for educational equity and social progress, to create a brighter future for us all.

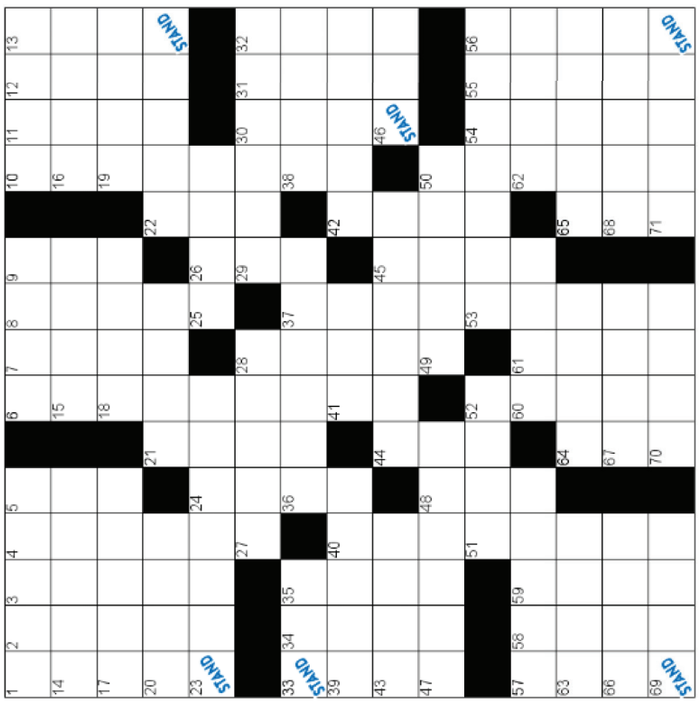
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CROSSWORD: STANDING FOR CHILDREN



ACROSS
1. Wifey's spouse
6. Yellow Teletubby
10. Healing wound
14. Boomer's video game
15. Eye part
16. Great lake
17. Cover a 2Pac hit?
18. Opals and diamonds
19. Solder
20. Feel lethargic
21. Whale pursuer
22. *This "publication"
23. Wearing bold clothing, maybe
25. Stinkiness
27. Spun farfeteched stories
29. Cracker for s'mores
33. *Volunteer
36. Catholicism and Judaism
38. Fundraiser reception
39. Opera parts
41. Long or Odeoti-Hassan
42. Discourage
43. Coral formation
44. Light
46. *Be on call
47. Sudan region
49. ___la la la la la la
51. Genetic info carriers
53. Food for Popeye
57. Delight
60. Successful songs
62. Adhesive
63. Person, place, thing, or idea
64. Not one
65. Small crisp toast type
66. Darn
67. Type ot test or hygiene
68. Wooed
69. *Substitutes
70. Hackman or Wilder
71. *An inverted vertical position

DOWN
1. *A definitive stance
2. Wombs
3. ____ Al-Hashimi (The Pitt)
4. Boastful
5. A sharp bark
6. ____ never strikes twice
7. Region
8. Purgatory
9. Donkey
10. Wastewater infrastructure
11. Team
12. Bothers
13. *Lamp, book, and charger locale
21. Atmosphere
22. Conjunction with "neither"
24. Buffoons
26. Cheap retail store (abbrev.)
28. Short period
30. *Coatrack
31. Maybe the winner of blind beer taste test
32. Lamb owner
33. *Customary, normal
34. Fertilizer and skin care ingredient
35. Dock
37. Bob, bouffant, or braids
40. Displays of disrespect
42. Meat counter
44. Nest egg
45. Faucets
48. College
50. Merkel or Lansbury
52. Use jointly
54. Bet the rest of one's chips, with "go"
55. Taken to the third power
56. *Like 71-across, with one more point of contact
57. *Table beside the sofa
58. Seaweed
59. Peron, Gabriel, or Soto
61. If ____ the Zoo
64. Sweet egg beverage
65. Hwy signage