



## Local Church News

# REACH Event Calls for Restoration of EITC Funding

By Jen Reed  
The Catholic Witness

The Educational Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) program is targeted for a \$10 million cut in 2010-2011, and the REACH Alliance is encouraging people to press legislators on the issue as they debate the state budget.

The EITC program helps students get the chance to attend their school of their choice. Funds come from businesses that direct their tax dollars to scholarship organizations.

Operation Restore, a campaign to restore funding to the tax credit program, held a town hall meeting of school officials, business leaders, parents and other concerned citizens at the Cardinal Keeler Center in Harrisburg in late April to promote ways to encourage restoration of EITC funding to last year's funding of \$75 million.

"The most important thing for people to do right now is to contact their legislators," said Erin Loudenslager, Program and Outreach Manager for REACH (Road to Educational Achievement through Choice).

She directed those interested in getting involved to send messages to their legislators directly through [www.operationrestorepa.org](http://www.operationrestorepa.org), a Web site that includes talking points, sample letters and YouTube videos promoting the EITC program.

The town hall meetings held last month throughout Pennsylvania helped to generate well over 10,000 messages to legislators, according to Ms. Loudenslager. The gatherings also armed school choice advocates with information to help further promote the EITC program.

"Since we're asking people to contact their legislators, we want to make sure we're giving them the tools that they need to do it, and to do it successfully," Ms.

Loudenslager said of the talking points and sample op-ed pieces and press releases offered via the Web site.

Since the inception of the EITC program in 2001, more than 3,600 companies have pledged nearly \$490 million to EITC organizations. Scholarship organizations, such as the Diocese of Harrisburg's Neumann Scholarship Foundation, distribute the funds so that children can attend the school of their choice.

According to Operation Restore, if all 44,000 students receiving EITC scholarships would re-enter the public school system, it would cost Pennsylvania taxpayers an additional \$531.6 million per year.

Ms. Loudenslager estimates that 6,000 students lost their scholarships for the 2009-2010 school year due to last year's budget cut that brought EITC funding from \$75 million to \$60 million.

The REACH Alliance wants funding restored to help ensure that all students and their families have a choice in education.

At Seven Sorrows of the Blessed Virgin Mary School in Middletown, principal Loretta Miller knows how vital the EITC program is for Catholic education.

This year, Seven Sorrows School received more than \$50,000 in scholarship funding.

"The EITC program is quite important because we have nearly 45 scholarship recipients that includes 33 families," Mrs. Miller said. "These are families who, without the support of the EITC program, probably would not be able to come to our school."

Seven Sorrows students also understand the magnitude of the program. They create banners and signs and send notes of thanks to contributing businesses to express their appreciation. Mrs. Miller also gives business representatives tours of the new school, which opened last fall.



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Danielle Kozich, a consultant working with the REACH Alliance, leads a presentation during last month's Operation Restore town hall meeting at the Cardinal Keeler Center in Harrisburg.

"The program is a great way for businesses to direct their tax dollars toward private education," Mrs. Miller said. "It gives the kids a chance to go to the school of their choice, and it gives businesses an opportunity to be involved in and give back to the community."

Ms. Loudenslager that many legislators support the EITC program, a national model and the first effort of its kind in the country. Still, constituents are urged to contact legislators to demonstrate their support as well.

"There are so many students who are trapped in school districts that don't work for them, regardless of whether or not those school districts are failing," she said. "The EITC program is really a lifeline for those

students. They can be sent to a school that works for them and gives them an opportunity to succeed in the future."



For more information on restoring funding to the EITC program and how you can get involved, visit:

[www.operationrestorepa.org](http://www.operationrestorepa.org)  
[www.youtube.com/reachalliance](http://www.youtube.com/reachalliance)  
[www.paschoolchoice.org](http://www.paschoolchoice.org)  
[www.pacatholic.org](http://www.pacatholic.org)