

# Current bills could hurt students at non-public schools

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Many of you have been listening to the struggles the State of Minnesota faces to balance the budget for the next



**BISHOP KINNEY**

biennium. The bishops of Minnesota are grateful for the work of the Minnesota Catholic Conference during this intense legislative time. The Minnesota Catholic Conference monitors state legislative activity in its role as the public policy voice of the

Catholic Church in Minnesota. Most recently, a number of alarming initiatives have surfaced in the current legislative session that would negatively impact all non-public schools.

- Bills have been heard in both Senate and House committees that would eliminate transportation for special education services and severely curtail instructional services to non-public students who are eligible for special education.

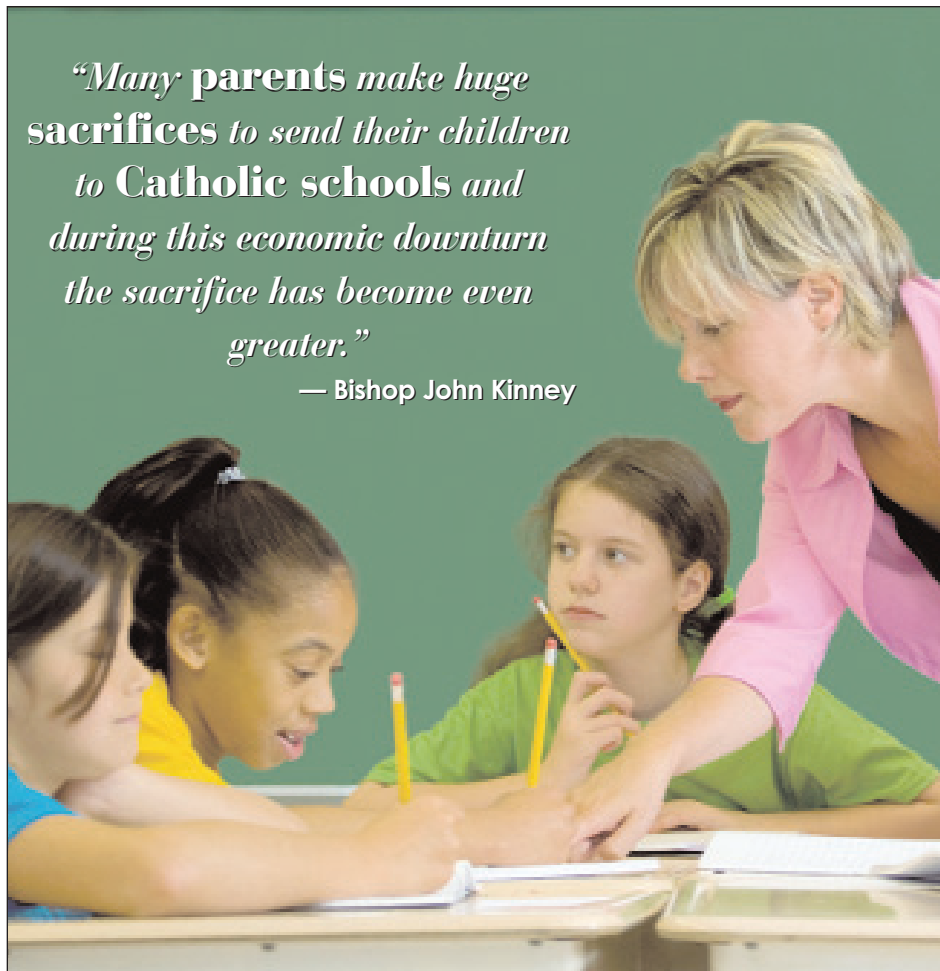
As a consequence special education services would be eliminated for five out of six non-public students currently receiving those services.

- Another proposed bill would eliminate Minnesota's K-12 Education Income Tax Deduction and Credits Program, crippling parental choice in education for thousands of families. Income tax deductions have been allowed in Minnesota for private education since 1955.

- A measure has been introduced

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that would allow school districts to charge fees for non-public students to ride school buses to and from school, a benefit provided since the 1950s.

Charging bus fees to non-public families raises questions of fairness and concerns for children's safety.

- For many years, preschool programs in non-public schools were treated the same as they are in public school settings, as school-related educa-

tion programs. A change occurred a few years ago that began treating non-public preschools like child care centers, requiring licensure under Minnesota's Department of Human Services.

When objections were raised to the inequitable application of requirements to non-public preschools, the Legislature declared a moratorium to provide time to review the situation. It

is important that legislators now enact a law that would exclude non-public schools from licensure and allow them to be part of the school-related educational program.

Catholic schools have a rich tradition in the State of Minnesota. Many parents make huge sacrifices to send their children to Catholic schools and during this economic downturn the sacrifice has become even greater.

The single most important action that school parents and stakeholders can take is to contact their state senators and representatives, asking them to help preserve these benefits for non-public school children and families. At the same time, they might remind lawmakers what a great asset our non-public schools are to the State of Minnesota.

The Minnesota Catholic Conference provides a citizen-easy advocacy tool called the Minnesota Catholic Advocacy Network.

This tool provides access to lawmakers and a way parents and interested folks are able to express their opinions about legislation that would either be helpful or harmful to non-public school families.

I invite you to join in advocacy by joining MNCAN at [www.mncc.org](http://www.mncc.org). There is no fee for joining MNCAN, an important tool in contacting lawmakers about issues impacting your families and our state.

+John F. Kinney  
Bishop of St. Cloud