



100 S. Broad Street  
Suite 1200  
Philadelphia, PA 19110

## **Children's Scholarship Fund Philadelphia**

**Allyson Batista, Parent Ambassador**

### **Written Testimony to the PA Senate Education Committee**

**April 19, 2021**

My name is Allyson Batista and I represent the Children's Scholarship of Philadelphia (CSFP). I am a parent of students who have benefitted from CSFP scholarships, and I am also a CSFP Parent Ambassador. I am writing to the Senate Education Committee in support of more funding and an overall expansion of access to quality schools for Pennsylvania families.

My position in favor of expansion of parental choice stems from personal history and experience. In 2008, when my middle daughter was 3 years old, financial circumstances were weighing heavily on my ability to afford private school tuition for all of my children. At that time, my oldest daughter was in 4<sup>th</sup> grade at my parish elementary. I often discussed these concerns with her Pre-K teacher, who gave me a yellow pamphlet that had information about a scholarship program. She encouraged me to apply, which I did, and ultimately, was selected for a scholarship through the lottery program. Certainly, an enormous financial burden was lifted, but I had no clue how much a part of my life this program called Children's Scholarship Fund of Philadelphia would become! Over the years, I was fortunate enough to add my middle daughter as a sibling to CSFP program once she was ready for Kindergarten, and later, to have my youngest son be selected again for the scholarship from the sibling lottery. These opportunities have undoubtedly made it possible for me to provide the most appropriate and stable educational foundation for all three of my children.

My oldest, Julia is an alumna of the CSFP, program and was selected as one of the recognized high school graduates achievement awards in 2016. She is now a Temple 2020 graduate with her B.S. in Public Health (during a pandemic nonetheless) and secured employment even before officially having her degree as an essential worker in the nutrition department at Magee Rehabilitation Hospital/Jefferson Health. Julia was recently accepted to graduate school at Temple's Master of Occupational Therapy Program. Gabriella, also an alumna of CSFP and a recipient of the rising freshman award, is now a sophomore at Bishop McDevitt High School. She is an all honors student and is currently ranked 9<sup>th</sup> in her class. Due to Archdiocese of Philadelphia school closures, Gabriella will be transferring to Archbishop Wood in the fall, where she has already been recommended for Advanced Placement courses in addition to her all honors schedule. Again, CSFP has offered to help ease the financial burden of this transition with limited funding to support Gabriella at a school that best meets her needs, but with a higher price tag; allowing for choice based on my children's best interests and not restricted due



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to affordability. As much as I'd love another Temple Owl in the family, Gabriella recently told me that she aspires to attend to Harvard University and I think that when she achieves that goal, our family will be more than proud to welcome a new collegiate experience at an ivy league institution! Nicholas, my baby boy, is the last to participate in the CSFP program as he graduates 8<sup>th</sup> grade from Resurrection Regional Catholic School in June, where we are keeping our fingers crossed for him to finish strong with his current 93 GPA! Nick will attend Father Judge High School in September where he wants to play soccer and football and ultimately apply to their welding program while maintaining a college preparatory course of academic study.

I mention all of these achievements not to receive accolades for my role in the same, but because I wholeheartedly believe my children's successes are much in part due of our involvement with and support from CSFP. The availability of educational options coupled with the ability to afford the setting I deemed best for my children opened doors that guided them towards paths where they would inevitably meet with success. Small classroom size, individualized instruction, extracurricular involvement and a school family where other parents cared about the well-being and success of my children as much as I did theirs were critical components of what I know was the key to engaged, productive, and happy children. My involvement with CSFP and the school choice this program allowed me to have truly lends to the notion that "it takes a village".

I share my family's story to encourage your committee to create and support legislation that will give more families like mine the opportunity to achieve these successful outcomes. There are so many deserving students and families in Philadelphia and all throughout the state who are stuck in public schools that are low-performing or unsafe. Or, schools that are just not the right fit for a student to be able to thrive. These families would welcome an opportunity for financial support to help them choose the best school for their child. Please, consider these families as you decide on your committee's priorities.

Thank you for all you have already done to support families across Pennsylvania as they make educational decisions for their children. I am grateful to the legislators and this Education Committee for allowing me the opportunity to testify today.

Allyson Batista, M.Ed.