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The abandoned kids – state leaders' broken vows

By Timothy Cardinal Dolan

This past week we have had two vivid reminders of the best way to love and support our children.

The first came last Sunday, Father's Day, as President Obama rightly reminded us that the greatest gift we can give our children is a loving, stable, family with a present and responsible mother and a father.

It's the surest way to raise children who are healthy, happy, and ready for life's challenges.

The second is graduation season, and the conclusion of another school year, bringing to mind that one of the very best indicators for success in life is a first-rate education — something that the Catholic schools and other faith-based and private schools throughout the state consistently provide.

The statistics speak for themselves: 98 percent of our students graduate from high school, and 95 percent go on to college.

One of the Regents of New York state said to me not long ago, "You do twice as good a job [as the public schools] at half the cost!" Even those who don't like our schools — and sadly, there are some — have had to admit the excellent job that they do.

All of which makes the failure of our elected leaders in Albany to pass the Education Investment Tax Credit, or EITC, all the more disappointing.



Bishop Richard Malone joins students rallying in support of the Education Investment Tax Credit legislation (AP photo)

This year's state budget was the best opportunity ever for Gov. Cuomo and lawmakers to adopt the broadly supported EITC.

Yet despite the generous provisions for all education contained in the state budget, the children and families in Catholic and other private schools who stand to benefit from the tax credit were again kicked to the curb.

The concept of the tax credit is simple, and similar plans have already been passed in 21 other states and the District of Columbia.

Donors would be encouraged to contribute to scholarship funds for private schools, or to donate to support public schools, for which they would receive a credit on their tax returns.

There would be limits, of course, on how much of a tax credit a person could receive.

But, since the money would be donated by private individuals, there would be no state money — not a dime! — going to religious schools, resolving any constitutional concerns.

The concept was so clean, and the benefit so obvious, that the bill had overwhelming public support.

We partnered with labor leaders, business executives, parents, people from diverse faith communities and ethnic groups, lawmakers, teachers, students, liberals, conservatives, all in support of this bill.

The media was on board as well, with numerous editorials and columns, particularly in this paper, urging that the bill be passed.

Gov. Cuomo told us he supported the bill, as did Senate leader Dean Skelos. Eighty-eight members of the Assembly had signed on as co-sponsors. It had overwhelming support in the state Senate. We were assured that passage would be a “no-brainer.”

The only people that I knew who were opposed to the EITC were Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, and the public-school teachers unions.

The hundreds of thousands of families for whom we have been advocating are right to be disappointed. I know I am.

I am frustrated because the governor and state legislators have bypassed multiple opportunities to help these families. This was a proposal where everyone would win, and this was a year, especially given the welcome focus on education throughout the state, when no one had to lose.

Yet they stayed up all night in Albany talking about marijuana — but not a word about supporting our kids by finally passing the EITC.

The EITC would have been a lifeline to our schools, so the painful exercise of closing could be avoided.

(It seems that the only time a politician takes notice of our schools is when they are trying to get a child into one of our schools, or when there are not enough parents able to pay tuition and a school has to close — then there is plenty of handwringing and grandstanding by political leaders about the “mean bishop” closing a school!)

Gov. Cuomo and lawmakers have wrapped up their legislative session in Albany, albeit with much unfinished business, and will now devote their time to running for re-election.

Rest assured, this issue will be kept front and center by me and my brother bishops, along with the broad coalition of supporters for the EITC and the children it would help.

We're not giving up.

Timothy Cardinal Dolan is the archbishop of New York.