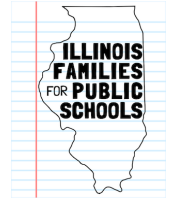


## Invest in Kids voucher program

### Case study:

Joliet Catholic Academy, Joliet IL  
State House District 98  
State Senate District 49



Joliet Catholic Academy is a private religious school that had 27 students using vouchers via Illinois' Invest in Kids voucher program last year. They received at least \$346,320 in Invest in Kids vouchers. \$57,720 of that (17%) went to low-income students (i.e. students who would qualify for free or reduced price meals.) No voucher recipients at JCA last year identified as Black.

JCA had a \$12.9 million endowment FY2022, according to [this spring 2023 report](#).

According to the [data on non-public schools](#) from the Illinois State Board of Education, in 2022-2023, JCA was 29% students of color, 4% special education students, and 0% low-income students.

ISBE doesn't report data on English-language learners at private schools, so there is no information on whether JCA serves any ELLs. There is no mention on the JCA website of any programs for ELLs, dual-language programs or bilingual services.

### Nearby public schools

The public school district where JCA is located, [Joliet Township High School District 204](#), serves a very different population than JCA. Last year it was 79% students of color, 58% low-income students. 14% of students had IEPs, and 13% were ELLs.

Joliet HSD 204 is being shorted [about \\$19 million this year in state funding, \\$2,818 per student](#), which they are making up in local property tax revenue. In FY2023, [they were only at 64% adequacy](#).

### Discrimination and other issues

JCA's policies discriminate against students with disabilities. Their [Academic Resource Center page](#) says (bolding added):

*Accommodations that fundamentally alter the nature of coursework or the materials assigned, or are unduly burdensome financially or administratively, will **not** be provided. These may include:*

- *Reduction in the number of test questions*
- *Longer completion time for class assignments*
- *"Chunking" of material*
- *One on one educational support*
- *Modification of grading scale*

Their [handbook](#) says under the section "Wellness Plan" (p. 46) only that as one of the goals promoting physical activity: "*JCA will provide reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities and / or other limitations.*"

Under "Homebound/Hospital Instruction" (p. 19), the handbook states:

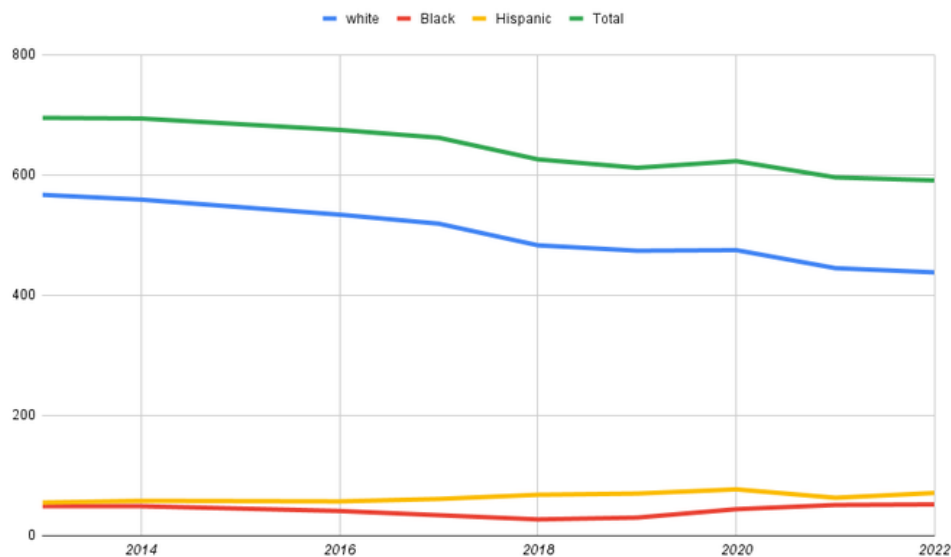
*There are times when a JCA student may become temporarily disabled due to an accident or injury and is unable to attend school for an anticipated amount of time. The parents, working in cooperation with the student's counselor, should establish a*

*continuing education plan. This may include, but is not limited to, homework sent home by the respective JCA teachers, a tutor supplied by the family and/or instructional services offered by the student's temporary medical facility. For more information, contact the Counseling Office.*

*If it is determined that the student will not be physically able to return to full-time status, he/she may be requested to withdraw from JCA and enroll in his/her public high school where long term instructional service may be available.*

There is also no mention on the JCA website of prohibiting anti-LGBTQ+ discrimination. JCA isn't run by Diocese of Joliet but by two religious orders, but lists its affiliation on the ISBE website as the Diocese of Joliet. The Diocese of Joliet has a [stringently homophobic & transphobic policy for its schools](#).

Invest in Kids vouchers have funded students at JCA since 2018. [Comparing JCA's pre-IK enrollment to post-IK enrollment](#), the percentage of Black & Latinx students has inched up slightly, but mostly due to the fact that the white population has been falling since 2015-2016.



JCA has been grappling with racial injustice since George Floyd's murder in May 2020. In June 2020, a group of JCA alumni [called for the school to fire their theology teacher and Respect Life Club leader](#), Jeremy Hylka, because of his racist post on social media. The alumni also urged the school to address longstanding issues with systemic racism. (More [here](#) and [here](#).) One of the alumni leaders of this campaign, [wrote in detail about his experience as a Black student at JCA in light of this incident and campaign](#).

JCA did put the teacher in question [on leave, and he subsequently resigned in the summer of 2020](#). They also [created a diversity and inclusion administrator position](#) later that same year.

Concerningly, that same fired faculty member, Jeremy Hylka, then began teaching at another school in the Diocese of Joliet, St. Joseph Catholic School in Lockport (also a school funded with Invest in Kids dollars.) Hylka was [placed on leave from St. Joseph in January 2021](#) due to allegations about child grooming. And [then in the April 2021 he was arrested and charged with child grooming](#) and fired by the Diocese from his positions at St. Joseph as well as St. Paul the Apostle Catholic Church and the Cathedral of St. Raymond Nonnatus. ([More here](#) and [here](#).)

Last month the [Chicago Sun-Times reported on questions about the Diocese of Joliet's finances](#):

*“As the diocese embarks on an initiative that could lead to mergers and closings of Catholic parishes and schools, Bishop Ronald Hicks and his aides won’t provide key financial details about their organization even as they acknowledge that finances are part of the reasons for the restructuring.*

*Among the subjects they won’t address: how much money has been spent under Hicks and his predecessors in settlements and others costs responding to child sex abuse accusations lodged against clergy members and other religious figures.”*

The [Illinois Attorney General's report on their investigation of sex abuse scandals in Illinois dioceses issued in May 2023 criticized](#) the Diocese of Joliet for “adherence to off-the-books, unwritten policies that derail justice for abuse survivors and much-needed institutional transparency.”