

A Valiant Effort: Student Coalition Gains National Backing, Determined to Convince Newsom to Secure Federal Scholarships

What began at one Los Angeles campus is expanding nationally, as schools in multiple states explore replicating the advocacy model.

PANORAMA CITY, CA, UNITED STATES, February 27, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- A growing



This opportunity could open doors for families across California. We don't want our state left behind."

*St. Genevieve Student Leader,
Jolie Avelenda*

coalition of students and national education leaders is determined to convince Governor Gavin Newsom to opt California into a federal scholarship program that could unlock billions of dollars in academic support for working families — funding that will likely flow to other states if California does not participate.

The effort began at [St. Genevieve Parish Schools](#) in Los Angeles, where more than 1,100 students have mobilized

nearly 15,000 purple postcards signed by members of the broader community. Now known as "A Valiant Effort," the campaign is expanding beyond campus as schools and education leaders nationwide explore similar models. Students selected the color purple to symbolize bipartisanship and the belief that expanding educational opportunity should transcend party lines.

Coalition members include Dr. Andrew Currier, Superintendent of Catholic Schools for the Diocese of Oakland; Jorge Elorza, CEO of [Democrats for Education Reform](#); Samara Palko of the California Catholic Conference; and Rachel ElginSmith of The Basic Fund, a California nonprofit serving low-income families.

The initiative is also gaining traction outside California. Robert Degre of FundEdu, an EFTC advocate working with schools in Rhode Island and Pennsylvania, is collaborating with higher education partners, including Providence College, to explore replicating St. Genevieve's advocacy model in additional states.

St. Genevieve has also partnered with Seton Hill University in Greensburg, Pennsylvania, allowing participating students to earn college credit for their civic engagement work — an academic collaboration organizers say reinforces that the initiative is rooted in structured leadership

development, not partisan advocacy.

In an op-ed published in The Hill this week, Elorza described the program as a matter of educational equity:

“By allowing funds to be used for tutoring, supplemental instruction, special education services and other learning support, including for students who remain in public schools, the program gives lower-income families access to the very tools affluent families already deploy as a matter of course. That is not privatization. It is equalization.”

The [Federal Tax Credit Scholarship](#) Program makes federal scholarship support available nationwide, but each governor must formally opt in. The program does not impose a fixed statewide cap. In a state as large as California, participation could represent billions in scholarship support over time. If California declines, those funds will likely go to participating states if California does not act.

Supporters say a common misconception is that the program benefits only private schools. In fact, funds may be used for tutoring, supplemental instruction, special education services, and other academic supports — including for students who remain enrolled in public schools. In Los Angeles, where LAUSD recently approved sending 3,200 layoff notices amid an \$877 million budget deficit for the next school year, advocates argue that additional federally supported academic resources could provide meaningful support for families without adding cost to the state budget.

Twenty-seven states have already opted in.

“We believe this is a valiant effort because it’s about students stepping forward when leadership matters most,” said student leader Jolie Avelenda. “This opportunity could open doors for families across California. We don’t want our state left behind.”

St. Genevieve students are known as the Valiants, and the school is recognized as a National School of Character. Leadership is not treated as a slogan, but as a responsibility — one students are expected to carry beyond campus and into their communities. Organizers say this “Valiant Effort” reflects that formation, uniting every division of the school, from its youngest preschool students to its graduating seniors, in a shared act of civic engagement.

To amplify public awareness, more than 1,100 students, over 100 staff members, and hundreds of parents will line the route in a coordinated display of civic engagement. Lining up shoulder to shoulder for more than half a mile — from the preschool entrance to the Panorama City Post Office — students will pass a symbolic first postcard from the youngest student to the school’s oldest senior, who will present it to the local postmaster. Bag after bag containing the remaining 15,000 postcards will follow in a coordinated show of civic engagement.

The coordinated mailing will take place March 31 — César Chávez's birthday — honoring his legacy of peaceful advocacy on behalf of working families.

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