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The Dean and Barbara White Family Foundation Commits Record \$150M to Big Shoulders Fund to Support Northwest Indiana Catholic Schools

This historic investment will significantly expand Big Shoulders Fund's support for Catholic schools in the Diocese of Gary

June 12, 2024 (Cedar Lake, IN) – The Dean and Barbara White Family Foundation, a non-profit, private foundation, has announced it is donating \$150 million to Big Shoulders Fund over the next 10 years. The funds will be invested in initiatives that aim to improve the quality, accessibility, and sustainability of Catholic schools in the Diocese of Gary. This is the largest single investment in PreK-12 Catholic education in history, signifying strong support and belief in the efficacy and impact of Indiana educational support systems, like the Indiana Choice Scholarship.

“We know that access to high-quality, values-based education is as important as anything we can support, and our efforts would not be complete without a deep commitment to the Catholic schools that have been a critical part of the fabric of Northwest Indiana for decades,” said Executive Director of the Dean and Barbara White Family Foundation Bill Hanna. “Big Shoulders Fund and the Diocese of Gary have developed an effective partnership over the last five years that led us to this moment. Now is the time to complement other advancements in Northwest Indiana at scale by providing significant resources to develop the nation’s most effective network of outcomes-based Catholic schools. It is this seasoned team from across the Region that will see to it that Northwest Indiana continues to build a brighter future for the people here today, and those yet to come.”

“The Dean and Barbara White Family Foundation has been a long time and proud supporter of Big Shoulders Fund, and we are thrilled to be able to expand our support and ensure that Northwest Indiana families are able to attain a high-quality, values-based education,” said Foundation Trustee Beth White. “My late husband, Bruce, and I share the belief that education is an equalizer that is paramount to making the world a better place. With Big Shoulders we have been working together to make a meaningful impact in Chicago and Northwest Indiana. Our partners are now poised to do even more in the place we consider home. As we move forward, it is the educational achievement and fulfillment of dreams of every student who walks through the doors of a Big Shoulders school that will truly define the success of this initiative.”

“Receiving a great education is the surest long-term way to lift up society one student at a time,” said Indiana Governor Eric J. Holcomb. “I am so encouraged by this vote of confidence in Indiana education and am beyond thankful for this life changing investment. This remarkable donation from the Dean and Barbara White Family Foundation will help change the course for communities through the dedication and hard work of Big Shoulders Fund with the Catholic Diocese of Gary and, more broadly, throughout the Region.”

Big Shoulders Fund will direct this investment in support of a high-quality, data-driven, outcome-focused network of Catholic schools that prioritizes the educational needs of all students within the diocese to boost college and career outcomes.

“I’m in awe of the support from the community and the Dean and Barbara White Family Foundation,” said CEO of Big Shoulders Fund Josh Hale. “Leveraging the network, we’ll build upon the great relationship we have with the Diocese of Gary to drive a high-quality, data-driven education model that delivers strong student outcomes. We’re extremely excited about the doors this investment will open, such as the creation and enhancement of curriculum, advanced professional development and growth opportunities for teachers and school leadership, and, of course, valuable support services for our students.”

The investment will focus primarily on serving students and communities with the greatest amount of economic and educational need in Northwest Indiana, regardless of race and ethnicity, sex, religious affiliation, or financial ability. With a focus on outcomes, the investment will support initiatives that focus on curriculum development, teacher training, leadership development, infrastructure improvements, and student support services, as well as new governance models, management structures, and assistance with enrollment and tuition management.

“This is truly a historic and transformative commitment from the Dean and Barbara White Family Foundation, the largest single investment ever given for PreK-12 Catholic education,” said Bishop Robert J. McClory. “On behalf of all families who will benefit from this commitment, we are thankful and filled with great hope for the future. This is an enormous vote of confidence for Catholic education and the value of our individual schools. I am honored by the continued commitment of the Dean and Barbara White Family Foundation, Big Shoulders Fund, and our community. This gift creates an opportunity for the Diocese of Gary to fulfill our mission even more vibrantly to support families and enhance our schools to become an extraordinary model of Catholic school education. We are eager to go forward and experience the impact this commitment and collaboration will have on the lives of our students, their families, our teachers, and our communities.”

“We have an unwavering commitment to providing a values-based, performance-driven education for all students enrolled at Catholic schools in Northwest Indiana,” said Diocese of Gary Superintendent of Catholic Schools Dr. Colleen Brewer. “We take a holistic approach to education that provides social, emotional, spiritual, physical, and cultural development designed to help children become compassionate contributing leaders in their communities. This enhanced relationship with Big Shoulders Fund will exponentially impact our Catholic schools’ ability to collaborate with families to nurture students and help them excel in their education. We anticipate that this commitment will strengthen the Catholic schools in Northwest Indiana, empowering them to succeed in measurable ways including academic performance, student growth, and graduation rates.”

Through the resources and funding provided by the Dean and Barbara White Family Foundation, Big Shoulders Fund will work to provide accessible, transformative PreK-12 education through at least 20 schools across four counties in Northwest Indiana. The gift is exclusively for the purpose and use of Northwest Indiana schools in the Diocese of Gary Catholic school network.

“Thanks to this tremendously generous gift and the continued dedication of the Dean and Barbara White Family Foundation, Big Shoulders Fund has a unique opportunity to carry out its mission to educate students, strengthen families, and preserve communities by providing all children with access to a quality, values-based education,” said Executive Director of Big Shoulders Fund Northwest Indiana Dan Kozlowski. “With the excellent partnership of the Diocese of Gary at our side, this gift will transform the education landscape in Northwest Indiana to positively impact our communities for generations. This is an incredibly exciting moment.”

The Diocese of Gary also announced that it will establish an independent endowment within The Catholic Foundation for Northwest Indiana, a 501(c)(3) non-profit, independent corporation by the end of the 2024 calendar year. This commitment of the Diocese of Gary is in addition to and distinct from the donation of the Dean and Barbara White Family Foundation. The goal is for the invested endowment funds to grow exponentially up to \$50 million over the next 15 years and be used to supplement the compensation of principals, teachers, and staff within the Diocese of Gary Catholic schools.

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About Big Shoulders Fund

Inspired by Joseph Cardinal Bernardin, Big Shoulders Fund was founded as an independent charitable organization by a group of business and civic leaders in 1986 to ensure that children in Chicago’s most under-resourced communities can achieve their dreams through access to a quality, values-based education. Big Shoulders Fund has accomplished this by investing more than \$40 million annually in scholarship support and academic enrichment for students, operational improvements for schools, leadership

development programs for the next generation of school leaders, and academic programs and professional development for teachers. Most recently, through its innovative Big Shoulders Fund *Plus* program in Chicago, the organization is now directly managing 38 of its network's highest need schools. Since its inception, Big Shoulders has raised more than \$650M and earned a four-star rating from Charity Navigator for 17 consecutive years, a distinction held by less than one percent of nonprofit organizations nationally. Big Shoulders Fund takes a data driven approach to measuring performance and programs to ensure that children are positioned for long-term success. Alumni of Big Shoulders Fund schools go on to volunteer, work, vote, and study at rates higher than their peers. They also graduate from college at two times the national rate, with Black and Latino alumni graduating from college at nearly three times and four times the national rate, respectively. In 2019, based on this track record of success, Big Shoulders Fund was invited by civic leaders and philanthropic funding to replicate their work in Northwest Indiana by sharing its model and best practices with schools in the Catholic Diocese of Gary.

About The Dean and Barbara White Family Foundation

Driven by our founder's vision, we support transformative community projects and self-sustaining initiatives that cultivate a strong quality of life in Northwest Indiana and state-wide. With the support of our partners, we are committed to creating long-term positive change and economic impact for all to enjoy.

About the Diocese of Gary

The Diocese of Gary serves an estimated 170,000 Catholics in Lake, Porter, LaPorte and Starke counties through 58 parishes, two missions and one Catholic student center. The diocese has 17 parish elementary schools and three diocesan high schools, serving 5,982 students. An additional 5,342 students are enrolled in parish Catholic formation programs. The diocese is home to two post-secondary institutions. More than two million are served by Catholic-affiliated agencies, including seven Catholic hospitals, residential and daycare facilities for adults and children, and centers for Social Services. Learn more at dcgary.org.