



# CCI September Newsletter 2009

*Hello All:*

I hope this first newsletter of the new school year finds you rested, focused and off to a good start. From a public policy standpoint, there are real challenges, but by working together over the next 9 months we will be able to move forward and restore much of what has been lost.

As you all know by now, this summer's resolution to Illinois' budget crisis negatively impacted our education agenda. Due to a budget deficit in excess of \$8 billion, the legislature spent a lot of time through the spring and most of summer wrangling over possible cuts, tax increases and other approaches. We have seen this budget crisis coming for some time, and worked proactively to lighten its impact on Catholic schools.

The Illinois Senate did pass an income and sales tax increase to help meet the budget shortfall, and the Catholic Conference of Illinois (CCI) ensured this legislation protected Catholic schools and their families to the extent possible by including in the legislation guarantees on fully funding our budget items (School Safety Block Grant, Textbook Loan, and Transportation Reimbursement), as well as an expansion of the tuition tax credit from \$500 to \$1000. However, this bill was not called for a vote in the House. It must be noted that CCI did not advocate for any tax increase -- our position was to ensure the benefits of Catholic schools and their families in legislation of this type.

Since the tax increase failed and thus the state lacked new revenue, large cuts to the state budget were necessary. To reduce the amount of cuts, the state borrowed \$3.5 billion on the pension fund, garnered \$1.8 billion in federal stimulus money, swept another \$400 million from dedicated state funds and will push somewhere between \$1 and \$2 billion in bills into the next fiscal year. In the end, the state budget was cut by about \$2 billion.

The General Assembly, not wanting to be associated with these cuts, passed legislation appropriating what money they had in "lump sums" to state agencies. This development did great harm to our efforts as we have spent years cultivating support for our programs in the legislature; support which does not exist in the state bureaucracy. This "lump-sum" appropriation represented a cut of approximately 50 percent in most grant programs. Unfortunately, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) decided not to implement an across-the-board 50% reduction in their programs and instead shifted money to the early childhood education and technical education at the expense of many other programs including those serving Catholic schools. *The funding for the Textbook Loan and Transportation Reimbursement programs were cut completely, and the School Safety Block Grant was cut by 75%. Fortunately, the Preschool for All program was cut only 10%, and the \$500 Tuition Tax Credit will not be affected and remains available to all of our families.*

The cuts to these programs are tragic and harmful. The truth is we are caught up in a fiscal mess years in the making. A massive structural state deficit still

exists, and the scary part is that next year there will be no stimulus money or swept funds to lessen the impact. These issues must be addressed soon, and we are, for the foreseeable future, at the mercy of those outcomes.

Still a focused advocacy campaign over the next 9 months will help us restore these cuts. It will be possible to reinstate the funding for these programs next year, but it will take a superior effort that begins here and now. Our challenge over the next year is to convince policymakers of the critical importance of these programs. Losing funding in a budget deficit year is one thing; if that money cannot be restored in the next year, it often becomes exponentially more difficult. We have already begun building a coalition of public schools, other nonpublic schools, and textbook publishers to work on this. You and your parents will be asked to get engaged further at some point, and I hope you will take time now to prepare to answer the call.

To begin:

- **The first job:** ensure your school has appointed a Legislative Action Person (LAP) on my email list and ready to distribute information and action alerts to parents and parishioners.
- **The second job:** communicate to your state Representative and Senator the importance of these programs; even invite him or her to your school to watch the children learning and show them education materials purchased by the Textbook Loan program.

## Legislative Update

Although restoring the budget cuts from last year will be a top priority of CCI's legislative agenda, we also want to continue to look forward and work to make existing programs better and Catholic schools more accessible. In this vein, we have taken up two issues:

**Corporate/Individual Tax Credit for Scholarships** - In addition to the work CCI has done to expand the tuition tax credit, we have also begun exploring possible legislative initiatives to provide tax credit backed scholarships to children from low and middle income families. We have drafted legislation and begun the process of editing/revision, as well as planning for how to publicize and promote the effort. Of course, this will have to be an effort broader than the Catholic Church, and we have begun recruiting allies - political, business, policy and hopefully soon grassroots.

**A New Model for Federal Title and IDEA Funding Distribution** - Working with Notre Dame's Alliance for Catholic Education (ACE) program, CCI has begun exploring the possibility of establishing an alternative model for determining and distributing federal grant dollars for services entitled to Catholic schools and their students. The aim of a new federal grants funding distribution model would be to ensure the proper allotments for nonpublic schools and to create a more responsive delivery system for students and teachers via a third-party fiscal manager. This model is being adopted by the Chicago Public School District, and we have presented it for consideration to ISBE. Their initial response has been to include the issue, via Senate Bill 1882, in their newly formed Streamlining Illinois' Educational Delivery Systems Task Force. I will keep you updated on our progress.

## OTHER LEGISLATIVE OUTCOMES FROM THE SPRING SESSION

**Senate Bill 138 & House Bill 643 (Expanding the Tuition Tax Credit from \$500 to \$1000)** – Due to the state’s budget situation, we have been unable to push these bills forward in the committee process. However, we have continued to add co-sponsors – 13 members in the House and 9 members in the Senate – and we use these bills as topics of conversation with the leadership in the General Assembly and with the Governor’s office. As mentioned, language expanding the Tuition Tax Credit from \$500 to \$1000 was included in legislation, House Bill 174, increasing personal income tax and expanding Illinois’ sales tax. This legislation passed the Senate but was not called for a vote in the House.

**Senate Bill 611 (School Technology Revolving Loan Program)** – Senator Don Harmon (D-Oak Park) introduced this legislation to provide state recognized nonpublic schools access to ISBE’s long-standing Technology Revolving Loan Program, which offers loans to schools on a 2 year rotating basis between grades K-8 and 9-12. At least 90 percent of the loan must be used for technology hardware investments (computer hardware, technology networks, wiring, etc.) and the other 10 percent on computer furniture. The interest rates on the loans are controlled by statute at a low two percent and last three years. For more information, including applications, please visit the web site: [http://www.isbe.net/curriculum/elearning/html/revolving\\_loan.htm](http://www.isbe.net/curriculum/elearning/html/revolving_loan.htm). CCI supports this legislation; it passed the House and Senate and was signed by the Governor on August 28.

**Senate Bill 613 (Low-cost Laptop Pilot Program)** – This legislation requires ISBE to establish a two-year pilot project whereby the state will provide a low-cost laptop computer to each student, teacher, and relevant administrator in a participating primary school and implement the use of educational software and computer skills training. The pilot program could include as many as 300 schools, but it is subject to appropriation. There was no appropriation in the budget this year. However, the definition of schools in the legislation would allow nonpublic school to participate, so perhaps in future years this program will become a reality. CCI supports this legislation; it passed the House and Senate and was signed by the Governor on August 13.

**Senate Bill 1828 (Longitudinal Data System)** – ISBE introduced this legislation to create, track and maintain a longitudinal data system by entering into one or more agreements that link early learning, elementary, and secondary school student unit records with institution of higher learning student unit records. The legislation requires ISBE to establish a data warehouse that integrates data from multiple student unit record systems and supports all of the uses and functions of the longitudinal data system. Nonpublic school may participate in the system by voluntarily submitting data, but their participation will not be required. CCI has remained neutral on this legislation as it does not impose any kind of mandate on our schools. The legislation passed the House and Senate and was signed by the Governor on July 30.

**Senate Bill 2071 (Teacher Misconduct)** – Senator William Haine (D-Alton) introduced this bill to update the list of disqualifying criminal offenses for teachers, ensure the notification of schools in the event of a teacher’s conviction

of a disqualifying offense, and empower the State Superintendent with certain investigatory powers as it relates to public school teachers. Senator Haine accepted an amendment from CCI that ensures the updated list of disqualifying offenses and the notification of conviction provisions also apply to nonpublic schools. The State Superintendent's role would not apply to nonpublic schools. The legislation passed the House and Senate and was signed by the Governor on August 13.

**House Bill 3982 (Transportation of Students)** – This legislation requires schools to transport students for any extra-curricular activities in either buses, first division vehicles (those designed to hold not more than 10 passengers) or multifunction school activity buses -- buses meant to transport 11 to 15 students. The effect is to prohibit transportation of students in 11 to 15 passenger vans. The legislation passed the House and Senate and was signed by the Governor on August 13. The requirement will go into effect on July 1, 2010.

**American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (Federal Stimulus Package)** -- On February 19, 2009, President Obama signed into law the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA). You probably know this piece of legislation as the “stimulus package” – the largest appropriations measure in the history of the nation.

ARRA contains nearly \$100 billion in funding, over two and a half years, for programs administered by the U.S. Department of Education, including a number of programs that require the equitable participation of nonpublic school students and teachers. Such as: \$10 billion in formula grants for Title I, Part A of the ESEA; \$11.7 billion in grants for Part B of the IDEA; and \$650 million for Title II, Part D of ESEA. Funds allocated for Title I, Part A of ESEA and Part B of IDEA will be released in two stages to States, with half being released by the end of March (received by school districts probably in late April), and the remaining released between July 1 and September 30, 2009, which is conditioned on States providing additional information. Funds for Title II, Part D of ESEA will be available in fall of 2009.

Those are national numbers. For Illinois, the ARRA provided nearly \$3 billion in education funding over two years, including nearly \$1 billion in additional funding for several existing operations and programs, including Title I grants for low-income populations and IDEA services.

The US Department of Education (ED) has posted numbers for Illinois on its Web site. The numbers pertinent to nonpublic schools are as follows:

- Title I Grants to Local Educational Agencies (school districts): \$420,148,642
- IDEA Part B Grants to States: \$506,479,753
- Title II, Part D: not yet available

**The Imperative:** *if your school receives Title I, Title II or IDEA services from your local school district, you must contact them now, tell them you know some of the extra money will be arriving soon and that your students are still entitled to equitable participation in services funded by that federal money. It will take meaningful consultation with the local school district, but be sure your students receive their lawfully entitled services.*

## Administrative Update

**State Recognition** – We have made good progress from last year. ISBE conducted some 120 school recognition visits this past school year.

We have also recently worked with ISBE to draft administrative rules for the governing of the nonpublic school recognition program. These rules will take the place of the current Policies and Guidelines Manual controlling state recognition operations. Although the Manual has been a work of collaboration for nearly 30 years and done its job well, the rulemaking will provide some badly-needed stability to the program by raising its profile, providing another source of necessity and requiring ISBE to perform the function not only in statute but also in administrative law.

Through consultation and meeting, the draft rules have moved through the first period of public comment. We are largely pleased with the result but will continue our work on this until the process is complete. The changes in the program will not be large but the program will be improved.

**Alternative Certification** – In late spring, ISBE proposed a revision of the administrative rules governing the process for individuals seeking their teacher certification through alternative methods (outside colleges of education). Their first draft required these folks to do their student teaching only in public schools, so they could ensure each candidate was teaching with other certified teachers. During the public comment period that just ended, we joined a coalition of folks submitting comments asking that proposed rules be revised to include Catholic schools as we require either certification or being on the path to certification as a condition of employment. ISBE is scheduled to meet in September to take up this question, and we will continue our advocacy.

**Preschool for All** – Please continue to consider your school's participation in the Preschool for All program. Although funding was cut by 10% this year, its ability to survive at such a high level in difficult budget circumstances proves the programs viability. This program is likely to see long-term growth and Catholic schools should take advantage. ISBE's primer, including applications and deadlines, can be found here: [http://www.isbe.state.il.us/earlychi/preschool/preschool\\_for\\_all.pdf](http://www.isbe.state.il.us/earlychi/preschool/preschool_for_all.pdf)

**LAP Network** – I strongly urge you to ensure your school has an appointed LAP or LAPS for this upcoming school year so that the Catholic School Legislative Action Network is kept up-to-date. *The work this year will be critically important, and its success will largely depend upon the willingness and ability of our principals, teachers, parents and parishioners to become engaged in the political process.* I will be employing some new communication's techniques this year – such as an earlier, improved LAP manual and a Catholic School Advocacy Facebook page – so please urge as many as you can to get involved.

The LAP network does not meet as a whole, or even interact except through central coordination, but it does communicate and act through my office and in the best interests of Catholic schools in Illinois. A school's LAP should be in charge of coordinating and distributing legislative action alerts and grassroots political activity requests as they come from my office. The LAP can be anyone: school administrator, teacher, parent, or volunteer, as long as they have the time and the will to work on legislative activities.

**Facebook Page for Catholic School Advocacy** – Always hoping to improve our system and methods of communication, and eager to invite more into new technologies, I have begun a Facebook page for Catholic School Advocacy in Illinois. Facebook users simply need to look up the page at <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Springfield-IL/CCI-Catholic-School-Advocacy-in-Illinois/124415842483?created> or do a search on Facebook of Catholic School Advocacy.

Being a fan of the page will allow you to receive real time updates and action alerts and access other things, such as pictures of events and rallies, links to pertinent articles and videos and access to the monthly newsletter. I am still learning the technology myself, but I do encourage you to check it out!

In conclusion, I ask for your continued prayers for the success of our upcoming work. We certainly took a big hit this year, but I know we can get it back together. I am endeavoring to shorten these newsletters significantly. I know the time you have available to read is limited; however, there has been a lot to report over the summer, so mark this month up as a necessary failure. I will do better in the future. May God bless you, your students and their families.

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