



Welcome Spring!

Last weekend, I was in Washington D.C. for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) Federal Assistance Advisory Commission Meeting. At that meeting, I and others continued to reinforce the need for a defined set of priorities in USCCB's work on the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The reauthorization could occur this year. The priorities I favor are described in comments sent to the U.S. House of Representatives this week:

Under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the most recent form of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, many Catholic schools have found accessing services for their students and teachers to be very complicated and frustrating. Therefore, the following priorities should be addressed in reauthorization:

- 1) Equitable participation by students in nonpublic schools has been a requirement in ESEA since it was first passed in 1965. This has been done to ensure and maintain the child benefit theory, meaning every child should benefit from the government's effort no matter where their parents choose to educate them. This practice must be maintained.*
- 2) The provisions relating to the participation of nonpublic school students, teachers, and parents in ESEA programs should be combined into one Title. These provisions are currently referenced in three separate Titles and language differs. Reference to this new Title should be referenced in each ESEA program's statutory language to direct program coordinators to the requirements for nonpublic school participation.*
- 3) In recent years funds generated by students in nonpublic schools have been diverted to public school programs in which our students cannot participate, such as Supplemental Education Services and All School Improvement programs. These "set asides" do great harm to our community of schools and families, and they should not be allowed to divert resources from each child.*
- 4) Accordingly, ESEA should be changed so that the proportional share of funds to serve nonpublic school students and teachers in nonpublic schools will be based on the total allocation of a program prior to a school district setting aside funds which only public schools can use.*
- 5) Additionally, the law should be amended to require state education agencies, instead of local districts, to make the determination of the proportional share of funding for all federal programs which require services for nonpublic school students and teachers and to inform both the local public school agencies and nonpublic schools of the amount of their proportional share of such funding.*
- 6) Finally, the law should allow state education entities to subcontract to a third party or private entity to administer the equitable participation of Title programs for nonpublic school students and teachers. The third party would carry out consultation and design and implement a program of equitable services for the benefit of those students and teachers.*

The enactment of these priorities will be difficult. Without voice, they will prove impossible. My hope is that at the appropriate time, our nationwide advocacy will focus our best efforts and secure favorable changes.

Accordingly, the administration of the Archdiocese of Chicago's Office of Catholic Schools, and their consultants from Notre Dame ACE, recently joined me in a productive meeting with State Superintendent Koch. We discussed our hope for establishing an alternative method for consulting on and distributing IDEA and Title services. We also discussed important issues under current law concerning Title I and IDEA, and we hope changes in how both programs are handled at the district level will be coming soon. Expanded guidance from the state on IDEA, its child find provisions and Response to Intervention, should be forthcoming.

Legislative Issues

Voucher Success! Senate Bill 2494 – State Senator James Meeks' (D-Chicago) voucher proposal seeks to allow the families of the lowest performing schools in Chicago access to a state funded voucher to pay tuition at a nonpublic school of the family's choice. Earlier this month, extensive testimony on the proposal was heard in the Executive Committee's Subcommittee on Education. CCI, the Illinois Policy Institute and Agudath Israel testified in support. On Wednesday, March 24th, the bill passed the Executive Committee by a vote of 8-2-2. The next day, the bill passed the full Senate by a vote of 33-20-3! The progress on this bill is historic and important to our entire agenda. The bill now goes to the House of Representatives.

Grant Funding – CCI continues to work with Agudath Israel, the Illinois Coalition of Nonpublic Schools (ICNS) and the American Association of Textbook Publishers, to restore funding to the Textbook Loan, School Safety Block Grant and Transportation Reimbursement Programs.

Part of this work included an action alert to write the Governor's office and ask he reinstate funding for the Textbook Loan Program in his proposed Fiscal Year 2011 budget. Instead, the Governor proposed a budget that cut state spending on education another \$1.5 billion. To restore this and other education cuts the Governor proposed an increase in personal income taxes from 2 to 3 percent. His proposals are obviously designed to build support for a tax increase. There has been some indication that our support for a tax increase could lead to restored funding for Textbook Loan Program. The offer shows our advocacy is being heard and can make a difference, but CCI does not, at this point, support a tax increase. Our statement on this question and the state's fiscal condition can be found on our web site: www.catholicconferenceofillinois.org.

We will continue our efforts in the General Assembly, rallying support for legislation restoring funding to the Textbook Loan Program. Representative Chapa LaVia's (D-Aurora) House Bill 6096 now has 25 co-sponsors. Senator Ira Silverstein's (D-Chicago) Senate Bill 3530 has 16 co-sponsors. Our short term goal remains to sign up as many co-sponsors as possible.

Please call your State Representative and ask him or her to sign on as a co-sponsor to House Bill 6096 and call your State Senator and ask him or her to sign on as a co-sponsor to Senate Bill 3530. To find the contact information for your State Representative and State Senator, go to www.ilga.gov and click on Legislator Lookup in the lower, right-hand portion of the page. You can then look up your State Representative and State Senator by district #, your home or school address, or zip code. You can also call our offices for assistance at 312-368-1066 or 217-528-9200.

Catholics at the Capitol - The lobby day on March 3rd was a great success. Approximately 1,000 people from around the state attended Mass with Illinois' Bishops at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception and then spent the day lobbying individual lawmakers. The Bishops, accompanied by CCI staff, met with legislative leaders and promoted eight legislative priorities. We heard great expressions of support for our educational priorities.

House Bill 4711 - This bill, introduced in January by Representative Roger Eddy (R-Huntonsville), stipulated that school districts do not have to comply with unfunded state mandates. The bill exempts certain requirements - such as safety codes and graduation requirements - but is otherwise designed to give school districts more financial flexibility. Upon request of CCI, Representative Eddy amended his bill to include nonpublic schools. He has also amended the bill to make its provisions prospective, meaning that only unfunded mandates passed after his bill's enactment could be ignored. This lessens the impact of the legislation, but it is still a worthy endeavor, and CCI supports the effort. The bill passed the House on March 18 by a vote of 103 to 7.

House Bill 3982 (Transportation of Students) - Passed by the legislature last spring, this legislation will eliminate the use of 11-15 passenger vans, as of July 1, 2010, for interscholastic or other school sponsored non-curriculum related activities. The new law brings Illinois schools into compliance with federal standards for transporting students by eliminating vans that have been deemed unsafe. Students grade 12 and below will be required to be transported in a school bus, multifunction school-activity bus (MFSAB), or First Division Vehicle (vehicles designed by the manufacturer to transport 10 or fewer persons) for these events.

The legislation also prohibited the use of MFSABs for transporting students to and from school as they are not regulated as school buses. CCI has since learned that a handful of Catholic high schools in Illinois use MFSABs to transport students to school, picking up and dropping off these students on private property. CCI worked with Senator Dan Cronin (R-Elmhurst), ranking minority member of the Senate Education Committee, to introduce legislation allowing this practice. Senate Bill 2879 passed out of the Senate on a unanimous roll call. However, the Secretary of State's office has contacted me to register their opposition. I am working with Representative Joe Lyons and John D'Amico on a way forward in the House.

Administrative Issues

Important Dates – Most likely, your school has already submitted the following documents and data, but just in case, I wanted to include the deadlines for each. In most cases, a school principal can check ISBE's IWAS system to check the status of these reports.

- 1) Nonpublic School Registration, Enrollment and Staff Report: 12/31/09 *
- 2) Student Health Data – Immunization: 11/16/09 (system opened 10/16/09)
- 3) Student Health Data – Vision: 6/30/10 (system opened 10/16/09)

** For this year only, ISBE will accept this form until June 30, 2010.*

*** Please remember children must receive physical examinations prior to entering Illinois schools for the first time, prior to the date of entering kindergarten or first grade, prior to entering sixth grade, and prior to entering ninth grade. The immunization requirements, K-12, can be found here:*

http://www.isbe.net/research/pdfs/immunization_requirements.pdf

State Recognition – CCI has spent the last year working with ISBE to draft administrative rules for the governing of the nonpublic school recognition program. These rules are taking the place of the current Policies and Guidelines Manual controlling state recognition operations. We were successful in shaping these rules to meet our needs and expectations. In February, the Nonpublic School Advisory Committee began meeting with ISBE staff to begin revisions to the probe document (used in state recognition visits) to match the new rules. The new probe document will not be used in the field until next school year.

Principal Certification – ISBE and the Illinois Board of Higher Education are working on a program of revising how principals are certified in Illinois. They have provided a briefing to CCI and ICNS indicating that new administrative rules implementing the changes would be promulgated in April or May. CCI stands ready to ensure Catholic schools and Catholic school personnel are represented and equitably treated in the process.

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, links to pertinent articles and videos and access to the monthly newsletter. Sign up as a fan today!

March has been a busy month. The legislature is in full swing and will remain so through May. I hope that our efforts to reinstate funding to the Textbook Loan, School Safety Block Grant and Parent Transportation Reimbursement programs are successful. However, I must warn you that the state's fiscal condition continues to deteriorate. At this point, the General Assembly appears poised to pass a six month "lump sum" budget, handing state agencies a fixed amount of money to spend at their determination over the first half of the next fiscal year.

If a "lump sum" budget is approved, there is little chance the Textbook Loan or Parent Transportation programs will be funded in the first half of the next fiscal year. Even if they are funded, the massive delays in state spending could push the reinstatement of the programs back many months. At some point in the future, the state's fiscal condition will stabilize, the General Assembly will get back to line item budgeting, and the support in the legislature for these programs will see them restored. Until then, we must do our best to persevere and be heard. May God bless you and your work on behalf of the Church and our children.

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