



Hello!

The spring legislative session has begun in earnest. Over 6,000 bills have been introduced and committees have begun the laborious process of deciding which bills will advance to full consideration. The Catholic Conference of Illinois (CCI) has drafted and helped introduce a number of bills on different topics, including in the education realm legislation to restore textbook loan funding and to support school choice by offering tax credits for donations to non-profit scholarship organizations helping kids attend nonpublic schools.

On the federal level discussion of reforming and renewing the No Child Left Behind Act has stepped up. The Obama administration would like to see this work completed by the end of the year. In a few weeks, I will travel to Washington D.C. for discussion and updates on our efforts in the regard and will keep you appropriately updated.

There is a lot to cover here in Illinois:

Legislative Issues

Textbook Loan – At our request, appropriations bills funding the Textbook Loan program have been introduced in the House and Senate. The following action alert was recently sent to you:

REMINDER: Legislation to restore funding to the Textbook Loan Program has been introduced in the Illinois General Assembly: **House Bill 1199** introduced by Representative Joe Lyons & **Senate Bill 1964** introduced by Senator Ed Maloney.

EVERY CATHOLIC SCHOOL: Please contact your State Representative and Senator and urge them to sign on as co-sponsors! Your school LAP can coordinate the outreach, be it through meeting, phone call or letter. You can find out who your state Rep. and Senator are by going to the General Assembly web site (www.ilga.gov) and clicking on Legislator Lookup in the lower half of the page or by calling our Springfield office: 217-528-9200.

FACT SHEET: Check out our web site for a fact sheet:

<http://www.catholicconferenceofillinois.org>

SAMPLE LETTER/EMAIL/FAX LANGUAGE:

According to the Illinois Constitutions, the government of this state is charged with “the educational development of all persons.”

To that end: the Textbook Loan Program has been in operation since 1975. Its purpose is to provide secular textbooks, learning materials and instructional computer software to public and nonpublic school students grades K-12. Although the bulk of the program’s funding goes to public schools, Catholic schools have long depended on this program and have used the benefit to continually update math, science, and reading textbooks, as well as to purchase new instructional software for technology labs. Students cannot learn or succeed without effective and up-to-date learning materials, and this program has helped ensure those materials are present in ALL schools.

According to the Illinois State Board of Education’s (ISBE) published analysis, the Textbook Loan program impacts 2.1 million students and 164,000 educators. Fully funded, the program provides approximately \$40 per student to use for the purchase of approved materials, and serves every grade on a two-year cycle: Kindergarten thru 6 one year; grades 7 thru 12 the next. Considering the widespread service of this program, we hope and urge you to include funding for this program in the next fiscal year budget. Representative Joe Lyons and Senator Ed Maloney have introduced legislation to restore funding – House Bill 1199 and Senate Bill 1964. Please support and even sign on as co-sponsors to this important legislation.

WE NEED YOU: Your support of this initiative is essential – please be sure your representatives hear from you and your school community!

In addition, we continue to work with ISBE on legislation to redesign the Textbook Loan Program to operate in a way more like the School Safety Block Grant – meaning a school’s share of textbook money would be sent directly to the school for the purchase of secular textbooks. The textbook redesign has been introduced, as **House Bill 3115**, and we are working with ISBE on an amendment that would ensure our support. This move could be beneficial to our funding efforts, but we need to ensure the program’s design is workable. The bill has been assigned to the House Education Committee.

School Choice – One of the effects of our work last year on the voucher bill (and how close we came to passing it) is there are a lot of people trying to get in on the act now. There are at least six pieces of legislation including some type of school choice component. However, this week we introduced our Educational Improvement Tax Credit legislation that will be the focus of our efforts:

House Bill 3479 (Yarborough-D) creates a tax credit for contributions, by any taxpayer, to qualified student assistance organizations. The credit may not exceed \$100,000 for any one taxpayer and will total 90% of the contribution. SAOs will use the money to provide educational support services or to provide scholarships covering the qualified educational expenses of low-income students enrolling in a nonpublic school. The program will include statewide coverage and be capped at \$30 million annually. Work still needs to be done on this legislation, and we are awaiting a committee assignment, but as we move forward, you will receive more information and will be asked to support our advocacy efforts.

Concussion – Many different bills have been introduced dealing with concussions and high school athletes; too many to describe here. However, the bill that seems to be gathering the most attention, and passed the House this week, is **House Bill 200** (Cross-R). This legislation requires school boards to adopt a policy regarding student athlete concussions and head injuries that is in compliance with the protocols, policies, and by-laws of the Illinois High School Association. As the bill is currently written it would not apply to nonpublic schools.

House Bill 1240 (Franks-D) – This legislation provides that upon request of a school, school district, community college district, or private school, any information obtained by a school district pursuant to provisions concerning criminal history records checks and checks of the Statewide Sex Offender Database and Statewide Child Murderer and Violent Offender Against Youth Database within the last year must be made available to that school, school district, community college district, or private school. The bill provides for requests to public school districts – not to nonpublic schools. CCI supports the bill, and it passed the House this week.

Senate Bill 1619 (Steans-D) – This legislation seeks to require programs of comprehensive sex education on public schools choosing to teach any form of sex education. However, in doing so it amends the Critical Health Problems and Comprehensive Health Education Act, which also applies to nonpublic schools, to replace references from “abstinence until marriage” to just “abstinence.” The reason for this change is unclear, but pending a discussion with the legislation’s sponsor, CCI will oppose the bill.

Senate Bill 1931 (Pankau-R) – Last year, we passed legislation through the Senate that would have allowed our high schools to transport children between nonpublic schools in multi-function school activity buses. These buses are already allowed to be used for transporting children for extra-curricular activities. However, the Secretary of State objected to the legislation, and the bill went nowhere in the House. The Secretary of State is the regulator of school bus operation in Illinois. This legislation takes a slightly different approach

by allowing transportation of all students for curriculum-based activities but would not allow transportation between home and schools. If passed, this legislation would not completely address the problem, but could help add some flexibility. CCI will support the legislation, but the Secretary of State is likely to remain opposed.

Administrative Issues

State Recognition – Through hard work and persistence, we have finally broken through with ISBE and made some major progress on state recognition. At a meeting in January, we agreed to (1) a final version of the probe document to be used in state recognition visits, which included most of the changes we suggested, (2) several additions to the “proof indicator” (evidence) lists for the probe document which will help school administrators prepare for visits, (3) a schedule of school visits for the remaining school year, and (4) language for changes to the administrative rules to ensure that in the future visits can take place throughout the school year and that recognition status will last until the following year’s status is determined.

State recognition visits are on-going and schedules for next year are being prepared.

Facebook Page for Catholic School Advocacy – To augment the LAP network and monthly newsletter, and eager to invite more into new technologies, I have setup 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 updates, action alerts and access to other things, such as pictures of events and rallies as well as links to pertinent articles and videos.

Thank you for all that you do on behalf of Catholic schools!

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