



Hello!

On Wednesday, May 5, 2010, the Illinois House of Representatives added another failure to the already dysfunctional record of state government in recent years. On that day, Senate Bill 2494, legislation seeking to establish a pilot voucher program as a means to deliver as many as 30,000 students from Chicago's worst performing and most overcrowded public schools, was voted down.

Why was it voted down? No opponent of the legislation ever argued that the public schools included in the voucher program were adequately educating children. In fact, a representative of the Illinois Education Association testified in the House Executive Committee that these schools *could not be worse!*

So why was it voted down? The program's cost was built into Chicago Public School's existing budget, at no additional expense to taxpayers, and the constitutionality of vouchers and tuition tax credits have been affirmed in federal and Illinois courts.

So why was it voted down? Opponents attempted to spread the idea that private schools – particularly Catholic schools in the City of Chicago – were looking to use the voucher program to take only the best students out of Chicago public schools. However, the Church's support for this legislation, and its offer of tuition vouchers only to students enrolled in the worst-performing and most overcrowded schools, belies the charge.

So why was it voted down? The answer is politics. Teacher unions vigorously oppose any effort to provide school choice. The defeat of school choice legislation is, in the words of one legislator, "job protection for union leadership." And here are some telling numbers: \$79,182, \$91,482, \$119,371, \$130,254, \$111,125, \$55,561 and \$22,250. According to the State Board of Elections, these are the amounts of campaign contributions received by individual state legislators from teacher unions over various periods of their careers. Every election cycle, teacher unions are among the overall leaders in campaign contributions. Now we know why.

It is important to note that neither political party can be solely blamed for this loss. The bill's primary sponsors in the House and Senate were Democrats. The bill passed in the State Senate with near unanimous support from Senate Republicans. The coalition supporting the bill included both Democratic House Speaker Mike Madigan and Republican Minority Leader Tom Cross. Support for the voucher program was truly bi-partisan.

No, the blame for failure must be laid at the feet of individual lawmakers and, in many cases, their prioritization of political support over real educational reform. Those too scared to rescue children from unsafe, underperforming, overcrowded schools in which the hope of the students are not merely good grades and a bright future, but, far too often, simply making it to the next day.

Conversely, State Senator James Meeks, State Representative Kevin Joyce and their bi-partisan group of supporters identified a serious problem, analyzed the factors involved and offered a meaningful policy solution in the face of stiff opposition. This is the best we can expect from our elected officials. We should and must expect it more often; perhaps, as soon as next year.

Legislative Issues

Budget Mess Continued – Upon completion of the spring legislative session, this truth remains: the state’s budget is a mess. Facing a near \$12 billion deficit and unable to raise taxes or cut spending enough, our policy makers once again decided on a set of budgetary gimmicks and lump sum appropriations to get through the next fiscal year.

The budgetary maneuvers – many of them included in an Emergency Budget Act providing the Governor broad powers to allocate state resources and hold back \$2 billion in state spending as reserves-- include a tax amnesty program expected to generate about \$250 million, taking out a \$1.2 billion loan against money Illinois would receive in future years from the national tobacco settlement, the “borrowing” of about \$1 billion from restricted state funds, and the requirement that statewide officials and top agency employees to take 12 furlough days and forgo a cost of living pay increase in the next budget year. Another proposal, to float bonds (borrow) to make the state’s \$3.7 billion plus pension payment, has not passed the Senate and could have a significant impact on the year’s spending. Overall, the General Assembly appropriated \$26.2 billion in general fund spending -- a 5 percent across-the-board cut (\$459 million).

The Illinois State Board of Education’s (ISBE) budget was not immune from these cuts. Mandated categorical programs – which are basically federally mandated special education provisions – were reduced by \$327 million. There is legislation to restore these cuts with an increased cigarette tax, but it has not moved forward. The lump sum for grant programs remained level at \$370.7 million remained level from last year, but the Governor’s authority to hold back spending could further affect this line.

All of this ensures significant impact on Catholic schools. As you know, the Catholic Conference of Illinois (CCI) has been working hard all year to restore funding to the Textbook Loan, School Safety Block Grant and Transportation Reimbursement Programs. In addition to seemingly countless testimonies and meetings, we asked Representative Chapa LaVia (D-Aurora) and Senator Ira Silverstein (D-Chicago) to introduce legislation in the House and Senate respectively to restore funding to the Textbook Loan Program: House Bill 6096 and Senate Bill 3530. In a showing of strong support, we currently have 33 co-sponsors in the House and 16 in the Senate. However, due to the General Assembly’s insistence on lump sum appropriations, no line item appropriations bills like these were allowed for a vote.

Our advocacy efforts to date tell us the state bureaucrats at ISBE will not fund textbook loan or transportation reimbursement on their own. ISBE’s continued opposition to any funding for these programs is difficult to understand and not in keeping with the Board’s strategic goals, which call for service to ALL schools

and ALL students. We will continue to lobby the Governor to use his power under the Emergency Budget Act to keep these programs alive, but the situation is very difficult. It is likely there will be no funds in the upcoming fiscal year for textbook loan or transportation reimbursement, and we may be hard-pressed to keep the Educational Improvement and School Safety Block Grant even at last year's reduced level.

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 we have built up for these programs will see them restored. Until then, we will continue to do our best to persevere and be heard.

Senate Bill 226 (Principal Certification) – In the last weeks of session, the Illinois State Board of Education and the Illinois Board of Higher Education introduced legislation to establish a new program for a principal endorsement of administrative certificates. Institutes of higher education and approved non-profit training organizations will be allowed to offer these programs. The principal endorsement will take the place of the current general administrative endorsement.

The current general administrative endorsements will remain available until June 1, 2014. Subsequently, the new principal endorsements will be available to those who successfully complete a principal preparation program at an institution of higher education or approved non-profit; have at least 4 years of teaching experience (however, the State Board of Education shall allow, by rules, for fewer than 4 years of experience based on meeting standards to be set, including without limitation a review of performance evaluations or other evidence of demonstrated qualifications); and have a master's degree.

Anyone holding a general administrative endorsement will remain eligible to be a principal in public schools (and presumably Catholic Schools). Moreover, a holder of the general administrative endorsement will be allowed to convert to a principal endorsement. Individuals who hold a valid and registered administrative certificate with a general administrative endorsement prior to July 1, 2014 and who have served for at least one full year during the 5 years prior in a position requiring a general administrative endorsement shall, upon request to the State Board of Education and through July 1, 2015, have their respective general administrative endorsement converted to a principal endorsement. All other individuals holding a valid and registered administrative certificate with a general administrative endorsement prior to July 1, 2014 shall have such general administrative endorsement converted to a principal endorsement upon request to the State Board of Education and by completing one of the following pathways:

- (1) Take and pass a State principal assessment developed by the State Board of Education.
- (2) Through July 1, 2019, complete an Illinois Administrators' Academy course designated by the State Superintendent of Education.
- (3) Complete a principal preparation program established and approved pursuant to this Section and applicable rules.

Also, the original version of this bill allowed institutions of higher education and approved non-profit training organizations to partner only with public school districts in their principal preparation programs. However, CCI sought and attained an amendment to the legislation which allows state-recognized nonpublic schools that require a certified administrator and have a majority of its employed teachers certified to also join these partnerships.

House Bill 4711 (Prohibit Unfunded Mandates) - This bill, introduced in January by Representative Roger Eddy (R-Huntonville), stipulates that school districts do not have to comply with any future 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, so we would not have to comply with any future unfunded state mandates. CCI supports the legislation, and it passed the House on March 18, the Senate on May 7 and now awaits the Governor's signature.

Senate Bill 3460 (Preschool Capitol Grants) - This legislation authorizes the Capital Development Board to make grants to public school districts and not-for-profit entities (including Catholic schools) for early childhood construction projects. These grants will be paid out of money appropriated for that purpose from the School Construction Fund. A public school district or other eligible entity must provide local matching funds in an amount equal to 10% the amount of the grant. CCI supports the legislation, and it passed the Senate on March 18, the House on May 6 and now awaits the Governor's signature.

House Bill 5838 (Outdoor AED Mandate) - This bill rescinds the requirement that schools ensure AEDs are present at outdoor athletic activities. CCI supports the legislation, and it passed the House unanimously on March 23rd, the Senate on April 28 and now awaits the Governor's signature.

Senate Bill 3547 (Electronic Textbooks) - State Senator James Clayborne (D-Belleville) introduced this legislation to allow Textbook Loan funds to be used to purchase electronic textbooks and equipment necessary to access and use electronic textbooks. CCI supported this legislation as it will be an important step forward once funding for the program is restored. This legislation passed the House on May 5, the Senate on May 6 and now awaits the Governor's signature.

House Bill 3982 (Transport 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 would consider

using 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 Senate Bill 2879 which would authorize this practice. The bill passed the Senate unanimously on March 18; however, the Secretary of State's office then expressed their strong opposition, and the bill remained in the House Rules Committee.

Reauthorization of Elementary and Secondary Education Act - On Friday, March 12, 2010, the US Department of Education released its proposal for the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA), A Blueprint for Reform. In response to this document, which also reflects the wishes of the Obama Administration, the Congressional education committees have been holding hearings on various sections of the proposal.

On behalf of CCI, I submitted the testimony on the reauthorization. You will find that testimony in the March and April newsletters.

Administrative Issues

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. It is also important to note that the state's budget situation could affect the schedule of visits next year. I will keep you updated.

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!

Thank you for reading and for supporting the work of the CCI. Please enjoy a restful summer break. This will be the last newsletter until next school year. I will keep you up to date as needed through email. May God bless you and the work of your schools.

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