



Hello!

As we enter into the final month of the spring legislative session, the list of education issues the Catholic Conference is engaged in has typically narrowed. The state's continuing budget crisis, the resulting focus on budget reforms and the redistricting process has taken a lot of time and energy and further narrowed the legislature's agenda. Still, we have important matters pending, including another call to contact legislators and ask their support of textbook funding, so away we go:

Legislative Issues

ACTION ALERT: TEXTBOOK FUNDING

Textbook Loan – As you know, 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, and **Senate Bill 1964**, introduced by Senator Ed Maloney, continue to move through the process, and we add co-sponsors every week. As the budget process will begin in earnest this month, we need to once again be heard:

ACTION ALERT: Please contact your state representative and state senator and ask him or her to support textbook funding in the Fiscal Year 2012 budget. They can express support by signing on as co-sponsors to House Bill 1199 or Senate Bill 1964. *

HOW: To find the contact information for your state representative and state senator, you can go to the Illinois General Assembly's web site: www.ilga.gov – on the bottom right hand column click on Legislator Lookup and follow the instruction on entering your home address. If you cannot do this, call our office and ask for assistance: 217-528-9200.

WHY: In the last funded year of Textbook Loan, Catholic schools received an allotment of approximately \$35 a student. However, the program operated on a two-year cycle: elementary schools one year; high schools the next. Using 2010-2011 enrollment numbers, the amounts at stake for Illinois' Catholic schools can be calculated:

* Elementary Schools: enrollment 98,472 x \$35 = **\$3,446,520 every other year.**

* High Schools: enrollment 41,013 x \$35 = **\$1,435,455 every other year.**

SAMPLE LETTER, FAX OR EMAIL MESSAGE:

I write today to ask support for funding Illinois' long-standing and highly effective textbook program. The textbook program is not new! Since 1975, the program has provided secular textbooks, learning materials and instructional computer software to public and nonpublic school students in grades K-12.

Although the majority of the program's funding goes to public schools, Catholic schools have long depended on this program 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 up-to-date learning materials, and this program has helped ensure those materials are present in ALL schools.

Catholic schools represent a significant and highly accomplished part of our state's education system. Obviously, the state's budget crisis is severe; however, policy decisions that exclude tax-paying families – who by the choice of a Catholic school save the state significant money – from the state's system of educational support are poorly reasoned and deeply flawed.

Moreover, the Catholic Conference of Illinois has worked with the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) on legislation designed to ensure the operations of the textbook program are more efficient and cost-effective. Now that ISBE has agreed to our amendment in the Senate, **House Bill 3115** is without opposition and will transform the Textbook Loan Program to a Textbook Block Grant. The purpose and effect of the program will not change, but the design of the program, which required annual re-appropriations and built up interest payments to vendors, will be reformed to remove those obstacles.

The lump-sum appropriations of the past two years allowed ISBE to kill funding for the program. However, as the program is the sole dedicated appropriation for instructional materials in the state budget, we strongly believe funding represents a wise investment in the future.

We have done all we can in support of textbook funding; now to include supporting a legislative redesign of the long-standing program. We ask you to join our support and provide funding for textbooks in the FY 2012 budget.

As you read above, we have agreed with the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) on legislation to redesign the Textbook Loan Program. In the future, if funded, the textbook program will become a block grant, operating much 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, **House Bill 3115**, has passed the House of Representatives and now awaits consideration of the Senate. This move will be beneficial to our funding efforts as the reform is primarily designed to make the program more cost-effective and efficient to manage.

** If your school is located within the legislative districts of members of the House Education Appropriations Committee or the House and Senate leaders, the principal and LAP have recently received a customized action alert from me. Whether you act on that alert or this is unimportant – as long as you act!*

OTHER LEGISLATIVE ISSUES

House Bill 3479 (Yarborough-D) – This year we have tried to shift focus from last year’s Chicago-based voucher program to a broader statewide school choice effort. This legislation represents that effort. It 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. The bill was assigned to a difficult Revenue Committee. We don’t expect the legislation to move forward this spring, but we will keep working.

Senate Bill 1932 (Murphy-R) – Entitled the School Choice Act, this legislation is exactly the same as the voucher bill that narrowly failed in the House last spring (Chicago program focused on chronically failing and overcrowded schools). As we are supportive of all school choice efforts, CCI testified for the bill in committee but communicated to Senator Murphy’s staff our preferred approach was the tax credit legislation in the House. The bill passed the Senate Education Committee (7 to 3) and currently awaits consideration of the full Senate.

House Bill 2984 (Sosnowski-R) – This legislation creates the Tuition Voucher Program Task Force to study the feasibility of a statewide tuition voucher program and requires the State Board of Education to provide administrative and other support to the task force. Upon completion of the task force’s report it will be forwarded to the Governor and the General Assembly. CCI supports this legislation, and it passed the House. The bill now awaits committee assignment in the Senate.

Concussion – Many different bills have been introduced dealing with concussions and high school athletes; too many to describe here. However, the bills that seems to be gathering the most attention are **House Bill 200** (Cross-R) which 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, and **House Bill 1197** (Davis-D) which requires all schools, whether public or private, who are members of the Illinois High School Association to adopt a student athlete injury policy that provides that if a student athlete is injured during play and the coach suspects that the student might have a concussion, then the student is prohibited from returning to play until a physician licensed to practice medicine in all its branches, an advanced practice nurse, or a physician’s assistant authorizes the student to return to play. House Bill 200 would not apply to nonpublic schools, and House Bill 1197 simply restates the current policy of the Illinois High School Association.

Senate Bill 624 (Raoul-D) – This legislation seeks to prohibit the Illinois High School Association from using an enrollment multiplier for nonpublic schools in state athletic tournaments. CCI supports this legislation as a means to encouraging the IHSA to amend their multiplier policy in a way that more fairly treats private schools according to their size and record in athletic competitions. The bill has passed the Senate Education Committee and awaits consideration of the full Senate.

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; it passed the House, and awaits a committee assignment in the Senate.

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.” On this basis, CCI opposes the bill. The bill passed the Senate Public Health Committee, and awaits consideration of the full Senate.

Administrative Issues

State Recognition – Early this year, CCI finally broke 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.

The visits for this school year are scheduled and underway, but our recommended changes to the administrative rules have still not been placed on the State Board’s agenda. A schedule of visits for next year cannot begin until these rule changes are made, so we continue to push ISBE to move forward.

Catholic School President/Principal Conference – CCI is co-sponsoring a statewide Catholic School President & Principal Conference for elementary and secondary school administrators on March 18-20, 2012, in Bloomington/Normal. This event will be similar to the Summit for Catholic School Education in Illinois held in February of 2007. We have reserved space at the

Normal Marriot, hope to use the newly refurbished chapel at the Illinois State University Newman Center, and have an outline of an agenda set including a keynote speaker. The theme of the conference is “The Vocation of Leadership” and the speaker is Fr. Anthony Ciorra, S.J., Dean, Graduate School of Religion and Religious Education, Fordham University.

I hope all of our principals and presidents will be able to attend this important event. Please speak to your superintendent for more information.

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

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