



CCI October Newsletter 2011

Hello!

In the second half of October, the legislature will return to Springfield for the annual veto session. Important issues like gambling expansion, Smart Grid legislation and possibly pension reforms will be taken up. The legislature may also address the desire of the Governor and the Senate President to reopen the current fiscal year's budget. If this happens, we will work to ensure the textbook funding – which was included in the original Senate budget – is considered for restoration.

No doubt you are frustrated by the state's failure to restore funding for textbooks, but this issue remains a priority for the Catholic Conference of Illinois (CCI), and we will work on it in the current fiscal year and for the next fiscal year. Persistence pays off; most legislative initiatives take years to achieve success and especially those pursued during tough economic times. This is where we are. The issue's importance to our schools and students demand we maintain focus and determination.

School choice also remains a priority. This month, CCI will convene a meeting of school choice experts and others to discuss the tax credit legislation put forth last year and how best to pursue it within the political and economic realities of Illinois. The Educational Improvement Tax Credit, as embodied in **House Bill 3479**, potentially encourages significant financial assistance to our schools without direct interaction with the state. The model has worked well in Pennsylvania, Florida and Arizona. But we will also discuss Illinois' \$500 tuition tax credit and opportunities to build on it.

In order for these priorities to become law, your school must fully participate in our legislative action network. Every Catholic school principal should have by now received a letter formally requesting the appointment of a Legislative Action Person (LAP). A contact form and a LAP Manual, describing our advocacy system, came with the letter. Your LAP may be the same person as appointed last year or someone new. You may appoint more than one LAP. The LAPs' primary responsibility will be disseminating this newsletter and any action alerts to your school and parish community. Many schools have success in appointing a serving board member as LAP, but whoever is chosen, please ask their commitment to the essential work of advocating for CCI's education agenda in service to your school and all Catholic schools in Illinois.

Legislative Issues

Grant Programs – CCI will continue to use the appropriation bills (**House Bill 1199 & Senate Bill 1964**) to advocate the restoration of textbook funding. We use these pieces of legislation for focusing grassroots advocacy and as a means for proving support among members of the General Assembly. As a result, funding for the textbook program (\$9.5million) was included in the budget passed by the Senate but ultimately not in the budget that became law. However, both the Senate Democratic caucus and the Governor claim the 2012 fiscal year budget remains unfinished and advocate a supplementary appropriations bill be taken up in October or January. This action would give us another chance to fund textbooks in the upcoming school year.

The textbook redesign legislation (**House Bill 3115**), which was signed into law on August 25th, is designed to ensure the program will run more efficiently and further encourage restored funding.

House Bill 3479 (Yarborough-D & Senger-R) – 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. At least 50% of expenses must be used on students living within the boundaries of failing or overcrowded public schools as defined in the legislation. The program will include statewide coverage and be capped at \$30 million annually. This legislation will be the primary topic of the October meeting described above.

ESEA Reauthorization – Our priorities in reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act include the idea of establishing an alternative model (third party provider) for determining and distributing federal grant dollars for services entitled to Catholic schools, administrators, teachers and students. A full list of our priorities in the reauthorization is available upon request. However, President Obama's administration recently announced a waiver system for public schools to avoid the accountability standards of the current law. Most experts view this as an acknowledgement that the education law will not be reauthorized very soon.

Administrative Issues

ISBE & State Recognition – Due to ISBE's budget shortfalls and a lack of priority, we are still waiting on a schedule of visits for state recognition this school year. Now that we are close to working through the rulemaking process (adjustments pending) and have completed the probe document, there is no excuse for not moving forward. If ISBE cannot schedule visits this year, we will pursue the option, contained in the new rulemaking, for utilizing third party accrediting processes for state recognition – this would include diocesan school improvement processes.

Maintaining the recognition status of all our schools, including securing state recognition for a number of new schools, is our top priority and so far has been successful.

Illinois Coalition of Nonpublic Schools (ICNS) – ICNS has committed to working side-by-side with CCI to restore funding for textbooks and school choice initiatives. Representatives from ICNS have testified at budget hearings and have made a real commitment to be represented in Springfield by hiring a contract lobbyist. These supportive actions are very important. I ask that your school consider joining ICNS if not already a member. A membership form can be found on their web site – www.icns.net – and the cost is only \$75 a year.

Facebook – You may have noticed I shut down the Catholic School Advocacy in Illinois Facebook page. CCI has hired a new Director of Communications, Mary Massingale, and she has created a Facebook page for the Catholic Conference as a whole, which will include education issues. Please like us on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/CatholicConferenceofIllinois>.

Catholic School President/Principal Conference – CCI will co-sponsor a statewide Catholic School President & Principal Conference for elementary and secondary school administrators on March 18-20, 2012, in Bloomington/Normal. 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. Principals should have recently received registration materials. Please do all you can to participate in this important event.

IMPORTANT FORMS & DEADLINES

Nonpublic Registration, Enrollment and Staff Report – This report became available on the IWAS system on October 3, 2011. Completed reports must be received by ISBE no later than November 15, 2011. Nonpublic schools that have registered with ISBE at least once in the past must submit their data online via IWAS. Nonpublic schools that have never registered must submit their data using paper form 87-01: http://www.isbe.net/research/htmls/np_entity.htm. This report (and Immunization Data) must be submitted before the annual Application for Recognition and School Calendar can be submitted!

Nonpublic School Application for State Recognition and School Calendar – This IWAS system also opened on October 3, 2011. The completed application and calendar are due November 15, 2011. As was the case last year, ISBE will include an affirmation checklist in the application that was typically part of the probe document. My office sent guidance to you on how to complete the checklist last year. If you need the guidance again, please let me know.

State Recognition: Snapshot of Important Dates

- October 3 Nonpublic Registration, Enrollment and Staff Report available on IWAS *
Nonpublic School App. for State Recognition and School Calendar available on IWAS
Student Health Data – Immunization system available on IWAS *
- November 15 Nonpublic Registrations, Enrollment and Staff Report Due
Nonpublic School App. for State Recognition and School Calendar Due
Completed Health/Immunization Data Reports Due

** Nonpublic Registration, Enrollment and Staff Report and Student Health Data – Immunization must be submitted before Recognition Application and Calendar will be accepted.*

I want to conclude this newsletter by recognizing the eight Catholic schools in Illinois named National Blue Ribbon Schools for 2011: Epiphany Catholic School in Normal; Mary, Seat of Wisdom Catholic School in Park Ridge; Queen of the Rosary School in Elk Grove Village; St. Emily School in Mount Prospect; St. Joan of Arc School in Lisle; St. Linus School in Oak Lawn; St. Paul of the Cross School in Park Ridge; and St. Therese Chinese Catholic School in Chicago. Congratulations to all involved and thank you for your hard work. May God bless you, your school and your staff and students.

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