



# CCI September Newsletter 2010

*Hello!*

The school year is already over one month old. I hope your schools and families have settled into a productive routine and things are moving forward. Understanding how hectic the beginning of the school year can be, this first Catholic Conference of Illinois (CCI) Education Newsletter is being distributed later than normal.

The summer was full of legislative activity, and the height of the campaign season promises even more. In an effort to help Catholics understand the choices before them in November, CCI has put together an issue survey of the five gubernatorial candidates in Illinois. Candidates were asked their positions on five important issues and were interviewed in depth to provide context. The survey will be released on October 4th and sent to parishes for distribution in Sunday bulletins. You may also find the survey and transcripts of each candidate interview on our web site: [www.catholicconferenceofillinois.org](http://www.catholicconferenceofillinois.org). Please use these materials to educate your school families – the issue of school choice is part of the survey and interviews, and the candidate's responses are very informative.

Unfortunately, the state's severe economic crisis – including a \$13 billion deficit and a backlog of bills months long – continue to adversely affect the programs Catholic schools benefit from. Along with most of the Illinois State Board of Education's (ISBE) grant programs, Textbook Loan, the School Safety Block Grant and Transportation Reimbursement are unfunded this year.

CCI has testified at every budget and committee hearing, attended many ISBE board meetings, met with the State Superintendent, every legislative leader and the Governor's office, and introduced legislation to restore funding to these programs. Unfortunately, it has not yet been enough. The legislature's decision to once again resort to lump-sum appropriating has forced reliance on state bureaucrats at ISBE for funding decisions, and we have not been successful in influencing their choices, despite the harmful and unfair nature of the cuts.

ISBE's failure to provide any funding for these programs, even with the significant reduction in funds provided, is difficult to understand and not in keeping with the Board's strategic goals, which call for service to ALL schools and ALL students. However, in response to our testimony at that June meeting, ISBE sent a letter to the Governor asking that he utilize his authority under the Emergency Budget Act to provide funding for the Textbook Loan Program. We will continue to lobby the Governor to keep these programs alive, but the situation is very difficult.

## Legislative Issues

CCI has not yet set next year's legislative agenda for Catholic schools. The elections in November may radically alter the political landscape in Springfield, and it would not be useful to set priorities without first reviewing the make-up of the next General Assembly and knowing who will be Governor. No matter the election results, our agenda will include efforts to restore funding to our education programs and a strong school choice initiative. Please look for the detailed agenda in a future newsletter.

A comprehensive report on the outcomes of last year's legislative session can be found on our web site. This newsletter will not cover every issue dealt with in that report, so please take time to look up the report and view its contents. There are two issues worth highlighting here:

**Senate Bill 2494 (Chicago Voucher Initiative)** – This legislation seeks to allow families enrolled in the lowest performing and most over-crowded Chicago public schools access to a voucher to pay tuition at a local, state recognized nonpublic school. The legislation is designed to fund the vouchers out of existing state payments to Chicago Public Schools and therefore would cost no additional money.

Last March, extensive testimony on the proposal was heard in the Senate Executive Committee's Subcommittee on Education. CCI 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. Our advocacy continued and several weeks later the bill was passed through the House Executive Committee by a vote of 10 to 1. Unfortunately, on Wednesday, May 5, 2010, after extended debate in the full House, the voucher bill failed to achieve the requisite 60 votes for passage. However, the bill received enough support to allow the sponsor to move the bill to postponed consideration. This maneuver will allow the bill to be called for another vote. We will continue to work in support of the legislation and hope to gain enough support to call another vote during the legislature's November veto session.

**House Bill 4711 (Prohibit Unfunded Mandates)** – This legislation, 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 that no future mandates on nonpublic schools will be enforceable unless also funded. CCI supported the legislation as amended; it passed the House on March 18, the Senate on May 7 and was signed into law on August 20, 2010.

## Administrative Issues

**Nonpublic Registration, Enrollment and Staff Report** – This report, required to maintain state recognition, will be available in the IWAS system beginning October 1, 2010. Completed reports must be received by ISBE no later than December 31, 2010. 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 with ISBE must submit their data using the paper form 87-01 that is available at [http://www.isbe.net/research/htmls/np\\_entity.htm](http://www.isbe.net/research/htmls/np_entity.htm).

It is important to note that the Nonpublic Registration, Enrollment and Staff Report will be using seven new categories of Race/Ethnicity into which students are to be reported. Your school should have received several emails through the IWAS system on this change. Unfortunately, the email was incorrect in several ways. Your school, unless a direct recipient of federal funds, is not subject to the law requiring data collection and submission into these new categories. The requirements of how the data must be collected and for how long it must be kept probably do not apply. However, as this form will have the categories, and the form's submission is required for state recognition, your school must be prepared to classify students within the given categories. The National Catholic Education Association has been using these new race/ethnicity categories for several years, so it should not be a drastic change.

**State Recognition** – CCI spent last year working with ISBE to draft administrative rules for the governing of the nonpublic school recognition program. These rules are now in effect. 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.

Unfortunately, ISBE has been unable to promulgate a schedule of state recognition visits for the upcoming year. Budget concerns, travel restrictions and staffing shortages have affected their ability to meet the need. We continue to talk with ISBE and hope to have a schedule done as soon as possible. There will almost certainly be a reduction in the number of school visits this year. CCI's Department of Schools has decided to pursue some alternative ideas for fulfilling the requirements of state recognition with ISBE. We will keep you informed.

### **Physical, Dental and Vision Examination Requirements**

**Physical Exams:** 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. A list of the immunization requirements:

[http://www.isbe.net/research/pdfs/immunization\\_requirements.pdf](http://www.isbe.net/research/pdfs/immunization_requirements.pdf)

**Dental Exams:** All Illinois children in kindergarten and Grades 2 and 6 are required to have an oral health examination. Each child is required to present proof of examination by a dentist prior to May 15 of the school year. The Proof of School Dental Examination form and the Dental Examination Waiver form are uniform for statewide use and are available on the Illinois Department of Public Health and the Illinois State Board of Education websites. \*

Every school shall report to the Illinois State Board of Education by June 30 the number of children with dental examinations completed and additional details regarding those examinations and the number of children receiving waivers for various reasons.

**Vision Exams:** All children enrolling in kindergarten and any student enrolling for the first time in an Illinois school are required to have an eye examination. The eye examination requirement does not apply to children enrolling in preschool. Before October 15 of the school year, each child to whom the eye examination requirement applies is required to present proof of an eye examination. The Eye Examination Report form, as designated and available on the Illinois Department of Public Health and the Illinois State Board of Education websites, are uniform for statewide use. \*

Every school is required to report to the Illinois State Board of Education by June 30 the number of children with eye examinations completed and the number of children receiving waivers for various reasons.

*\* The consequence for students failing to submit the dental exam (for grades 2 & 6) and eye exams is that schools may withhold report cards.*

**LAP Network** – As always, I strongly urge you to ensure your school has an appointed LAP or LAPS for this upcoming school year, so the Catholic School Legislative Action Network is kept up-to-date. The work this year will be critically important, and its success will largely depend upon the willingness and ability of our network to become engaged in the political process. Without engaged and active LAPs, we will be unable to restore funding to those programs serving Catholic schools or otherwise advance our education agenda.

The LAP network does not meet as a whole, or even interact except through central coordination, but it does communicate and act through my office and in the best interests of Catholic schools in Illinois. A school's LAP should be in charge of coordinating and distributing legislative action alerts and leading the effort to build relationships with local legislators. The LAP can be anyone: school administrator, teacher, parent, or volunteer, as long as they have the time and the will to work on legislative activities.

During the last week of September CCI sent reminder letters to all Catholic schools in Illinois asking that LAPs be appointed and their contact information forwarded if not already done.

**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.

In conclusion, it is important to point out that although the state's financial hardships have taken a toll on public support of Catholic school families, our connections in the legislature remain strong and the number of those willing to help continues to grow. I firmly believe that as economic conditions improve, we remain in strong position to see many funding cuts restored and significant school choice initiatives advance. Last year, despite all the political and economic turmoil, we were 6 votes shy of sending what would be the largest voucher program in the country to the Governor's desk. We are close. And we won't stop working until the state properly recognizes the great work of Catholic schools in Illinois, and the importance of supporting a parent's right to choose the best education for their children. Thank you and may God bless you.

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