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Happy Catholic Schools Week! I hope this newsletter finds you happily employed in the celebrations of the great work of our Catholic schools. I know my kids are busy with dress-up day, a talent school, book fairs, roller skating, bingo and so much more. It is a fun time of year no doubt!

But here in Springfield the new 98<sup>th</sup> General Assembly is about to begin its work. As I told you in my last newsletter, Democrats now hold supermajorities in both the Illinois House and Senate, so their agenda will be easier for them to implement. We are working to meet all the new members and lay out for them the Catholic Conference of Illinois' (CCI) agenda.

When it comes to education, the following goals will guide CCI's advocacy efforts for the next two years.

- Work to restore funding to the Textbook Block Grant, Educational Improvement and School Safety Block Grant and the Parent/Guardian Transportation Reimbursement programs.
- Maintain a smooth and cooperative relationship between the State Board of Education and Catholic schools to ensure an effective state recognition program for nonpublic schools.
- Advocate for the creation of an Individual/Corporate Tax Credit Scholarship Program and/or for the expansion of the Education Expense Tax Credit by raising the cap, increasing the percentage of qualified expenses and including refundability so that low-income families can benefit.
- Pursue and support other school choice options – such as voucher programs – as opportunities exist.

The goals above related to school choice will be pursued in coalition with a new group known as Freedom to Learn. This new coalition includes many school choice organizations and I hope will bolster our efforts in Springfield. As the coalition grows and begins its work, I am sure you will hear more.

## LEGISLATIVE REPORT

**ACTION ALERT FOR HIGH SCHOOLS:** There have not been many new bill introductions yet, but the bill we defeated last year seeking to require all high schools (including Catholic) to provide catastrophic accident insurance coverage, with aggregate benefit limits of \$7.5 million or 15 years for students athletes has been reintroduced.

These limits are far in excess of what our high schools currently carry and would incur significant new costs. The bill is **House Bill 127**. It is vitally important that our high school reach out to their state representatives and senators to tell them we require student athletes to have health insurance on their parent's plans, that the school does have some catastrophic insurance coverage, but that this proposed mandate is excessive and would impose a real and costly burden. Families come to Catholic high schools fully aware of the educational, spiritual and athletic programs. The government does not have a role in mandating these things.

If you do not know who your state representative or senator is (remember redistricting made a lot of changes) you can visit our web site at [www.ilcatholic.org](http://www.ilcatholic.org) and click on Find Your Legislator or give us a call at 217-528-9200.

**LAPS:** And as we begin our advocacy work, I will again remind you that it is vitally important to ensure your school has appointed a Legislative Action Person (LAP) for the year. Every Catholic school received a letter from me in the fall formally requesting this appointment along with a LAP Manual describing our advocacy system and the expectations for all.

## **ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES**

**ISBE & State Recognition** – Although we had a few issues with the November 15<sup>th</sup> deadline for submitting the (1) Nonpublic Registration, Enrollment and Staff Report, (2) Immunization data and (3) Nonpublic School Application for State Recognition and School Calendar, we were able to work out a deal with ISBE ensuring those schools that missed the deadline were not stripped of state recognition. I do not think ISBE will be so flexible next year. We need to do all we can to ensure these three forms are submitted on time.

About 35 state recognition visits through the end of the 2012-13 school year have been scheduled and are ongoing.

**ACTION ALERT FOR ALL SCHOOLS:** ISBE has also proposed a rule revision to the state recognition rules for a change in the requirements regarding school safety drill reviews. The drills and an annual review have long been a part of state recognition. However, for years, public schools have been required to hold an annual meeting to review crisis plans and safety drills to which local first responders would be invited. This meeting has not been required of nonpublic schools, but the State Fire Marshal and ISBE would like to make it required. As my education department has told me these meetings are a common practice in our schools, we are not objecting to the substance of the proposal. However, we do have issues with the manner and text of the changes. CCI, the Catholic school superintendents and administrators of other nonpublic schools have submitted comments on the proposed rules that express these concerns. I would ask that our principals now do the same. Please email the following text to [rules@isbe.net](mailto:rules@isbe.net). It will only take you a minute and will be a great help to us. The comments must be submitted by February 19<sup>th</sup>.

*Ms. Shelley Helton  
Agency Rules Coordinator  
Illinois State Board of Education  
100 North First Street - S-493  
Springfield, Illinois 62777-0001*

*Ms. Helton:*

*The following comments are directed toward the recently proposed amendments to Part 425 (Voluntary Registration and Recognition of Nonpublic Schools).*

*My primary concern with the proposed rulemaking is simple: I do not want the state recognition process to become a source of new regulation, particularly when such regulation stands in contrast to state law. This proposed rulemaking does seek to apply mandates from which we are excluded in statute. This*

*action opens the door to state recognition becoming yet another source of regulation, instead of compliance, and we are strongly opposed to such a development.*

*We also have real questions about what this proposed rulemaking accomplishes. The proposed rules say we have to comply with the joint rulemaking between the State Fire Marshal and ISBE that identifies the responsibilities of those listed in Section 25 of the School Safety Drill Act. Nonpublic schools are not included in Section 25. We cannot simply apply rules meant for public school districts to individual nonpublic schools.*

*In this manner, the proposed rules fail to respect the nonpublic school recognition statute which states, "The guidelines and procedures [of state recognition] must recognize that some of the aims and the financial bases of non-public schools are different from public schools and will not be identical to those for public schools, nor will they be more burdensome."*

*We believe these proposed rules should be set aside, so that we can work together on a better approach. To be clear, we are not rejecting the idea of a new requirement of an annual meeting to review school crisis plans, as this is common practice in our schools, but we would like it done in statute rather than rule and in a more careful manner than simply linking to another set of rules written for public school districts.*

*Sincerely,*

**Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)** – There has been a very important (and beneficial) revision to the IDEA Proportionate Share Timely and Meaningful Consultation (TMC) Timelines. Each year, school districts are required to hold TMC meetings with representatives of nonpublic schools regarding the use of a proportionate share of IDEA funds for services to eligible students with disabilities who attend nonpublic schools. In the past, this process has occurred in the fall of each school year not allowing adequate time to design a service plan for students and often delaying that plan's implementation until well into the school year. In order to change this and ensure there are no delays in service provision to students, and that the required proportionate share expenses are budgeted in the IDEA grants, the TMC timelines have been revised effective with the 2013-2014 school year.

The Illinois State Board of Education will release an estimated nonpublic proportionate share calculation for each district in April of 2013. The estimate will be based on the Child Count data provided by each district. Local school districts now must schedule and convene TMC meetings with nonpublic schools no later than May 31, 2013, and submit the TMC documentation to the Special Education Services Division no later than June 15, 2013.

#### New IDEA Proportionate Share Timeline

- April 2013: Release of estimated IDEA nonpublic proportionate share calculations (based on child count data from the FACTS March transmission)
- May 31, 2013: Final date for convening timely and meaningful consultations
- June 15, 2013: Timely and meaningful documents are due to the Special Education Services division
- July 1, 2013: Earliest start date for FY14 IDEA grants. Districts with nonpublic proportionate share calculations must include those expenses for approval of grants
- August 2013: Final nonpublic proportionate share calculations released

School districts have been notified of this change and should be proactive in setting up timely and meaningful consultation meetings with your schools and families, but you also need to know that these meetings need to take place prior to May 31. Please reach out to your district if you do not hear anything. Any questions on this can be directed to ISBE staff Andy Eulass, Julie Evans, Marcia Kelley, and Gary Miller at (217) 782-5589.

Thank you for your attention to these important matters. I hope you will be able to send an email to ISBE on the proposed rules, and if a high school, contact your state legislator about House Bill 127. **Please also remember to distribute tuition receipts and ensure your parents are claiming the \$500 tuition tax credit in their tax filings!**

If you have any questions regarding these issues, please give me a call (217-528-9200) or send me an email ([wichmann@ilcatholic.org](mailto:wichmann@ilcatholic.org)). I pray you enjoy a successful Catholic Schools Week. May God bless you and your work on behalf of Catholic schools.

Zachary Wichmann  
Director of Government Relations  
Catholic Conference of Illinois