



Hello!

Due to the configuration of the legislature's spring schedule, I have altered the timing and frequency of CCI's education newsletter. Instead of issuing a newsletter at the beginning of April, May and June, I am sending this newsletter now, at the beginning of a continuous seven-week stretch of the legislative session, and will send another in early June at the conclusion of the legislative session. A lot of work for the General Assembly remains, including completing the state's budget for the next fiscal year, proposed pension reforms, significant Medicaid cuts and regular order legislative business, so it will certainly be a hectic month and a half.

In this newsletter (next), there is an important action alert on Textbook Block Grant Funding! To help you focus on this and a few other important issues, I will leave a number of reportable issues out of this newsletter and return to them in the June. Please ensure your school and parish community participate in the Textbook Funding Action Alert. Thank you.

Legislative Issues

Textbook Block Grant Funding Contained in House Bill 6134 & Senate Bill 3908 (K. Burke – D; Maloney – D) – These two identical initiatives appropriate \$12.5 million to the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) for the Textbook Block Grant Program, which provides secular textbooks listed for use by the State Board of Education free of charge to any student in the State who is enrolled in any of grades kindergarten through 12 at a public school or at a State-recognized non-public school. These bills will assist in our efforts to restore funding to reconfigured textbook program. Unfortunately, due to the state's fiscal condition and the legislature's recent move to cut at least another \$258.5 million from the money available for education spending, it will be very difficult to restore funding this year. However, it is important that we keep this issue alive, and our elected officials hear from Catholic schools on the importance of this issue. We will use these bills to rally support to our side and provide evidence that this program serves an important purpose and is worthy of funding. Our profound thanks go to Representative Kelley Burke and Senator Ed Maloney for helping our cause.

ACTION ALERT: Legislation to restore funding to the Textbook Loan Program has been introduced in the Illinois General Assembly: **House Bill 6134** introduced by Representative Kelley Burke & **Senate Bill 3908** introduced by Senator Ed Maloney.

EVERY CATHOLIC SCHOOL: Please contact your State Representative and Senator and urge them to support funding in the budget for next fiscal year! Your school LAP can coordinate the outreach, be it through meeting, phone call or letter. You can identify your state Representative and Senator by going to the General Assembly web site (www.ilga.gov) and clicking on Legislator Lookup in the lower half of the page or by calling our Springfield office: 217-528-9200.

SAMPLE LETTER/EMAIL/FAX LANGUAGE:

On behalf of _____ school in _____, Illinois, I urge you to help restore funding for the Textbook Block Grant Program in the Fiscal Year 2013 proposed budget. Formerly known as the Illinois Textbook Loan Program, the Catholic Conference of Illinois (CCI) worked with the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) in the 2011 spring legislative session to redesign the program into a block grant. This was done at ISBE's request to help streamline and improve the program and in the belief that funding would be restored.

Beginning in 1975, the program's purpose is to provide secular textbooks and instructional computer software to public and nonpublic students grades K-12. Students cannot learn or succeed without effective and up-to-date learning materials, and for over thirty years, this program has helped ensure accurate and up-to-date textbooks and other instructional materials are present in ALL schools. In Fiscal Year 2009, the program provided 849,214 instructional items to pupils in grades 7 through 12.

There may not be any grant programs in ISBE's budget that have had as far-reaching an impact for as long a time. Providing good textbooks and instructional materials to children is a fundamental responsibility of the state, and this is the only state program that requires all its resources be spent on learning materials for students in classrooms.

In Fiscal Year 2009, this program was funded at \$42.8 million. We understand it is unrealistic to expect that level of funding could be restored in one year, but we do recommend that the program's funding be restored at some level. The Illinois State Senate included \$9.5 million for this program in its Fiscal Year 2012 budget. Additionally, there are current appropriations bills, House Bill 6134 introduced by Representative Kelley Burke and Senate Bill 3908 introduced by Senator Maloney, that we ask you to co-sponsor and support.

Considering the widespread service and importance of this program, we hope and urge you to include funding for this program in the Fiscal Year 2013 budget. Thank you.

WE NEED YOU: Your support of this initiative is essential – please be sure your representatives hear from you and your school community!

House Bill 5755 (Educational Improvement Tax Credit; Senger – R) – Just like last year, this legislation creates a tax credit for contributions, by any taxpayer, to qualified student assistance organizations (SAO). 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. CCI drafted this legislation and supports it, but due to the state’s fiscal condition we were unable to advance the bill out of the Revenue Committee.

Recognizing that CCI and our collaboration with the Illinois Coalition of Nonpublic Schools (ICNS) has been unable to advance this legislation past the committee level, CCI has pursued and encouraged the formation of a broader, statewide secular school choice organization. On October 26, 2011, CCI invited representatives from the Archdiocese of Chicago’s school board, Notre Dame ACE, Freedom to Learn, ICNS, the Illinois Policy Institute and other school choice leaders to begin this discussion. We have met several times since then and the school-choice organization Freedom to Learn and the Archdiocese of Chicago’s LAP Council has taken the lead in forming a new coalition. CCI continues to participate in these meetings and encourage broader participation. In addition, CCI is working with Notre Dame ACE to engage more nonpublic schools, and we are looking at ways to focus on Illinois’ Hispanic population and their elected representatives. Due to fiscal and political obstacles the work ahead of us is difficult and will take some time.

HB 603 (Insurance for High School Athletes; Davis – D) – Just before the third reading deadline in the House an amendment to this “shell bill” (empty legislation) sought to require public and nonpublic high schools to provide catastrophic accident insurance for students participating in school-sponsored or school-supervised interscholastic activities sanctioned by IHSA. The required insurance would have to include benefit limits of \$7.5 million or 15 years, whichever is first. The amendment also included language making IHSA the primary provider of this insurance coverage. As these coverage limits far exceeded the coverage provided by most of our high schools, CCI opposed the legislation and it did not move forward.

Senate Bill 3393 (Teacher Recertification; Steans – D) – This legislation changes provisions concerning the reinstatement of a lapsed certificate by providing that lapsed certificates may be immediately reinstated upon payment by the applicant to ISBE of (1) any and all back fees, including without limitation registration fees, owed from the time of expiration of the certificate until the date of reinstatement; and (2) a \$500 penalty or the demonstration of proficiency by completing 9 semester hours of coursework from a regionally accredited

institution of higher education in the content area that most aligns with the educator's endorsement area or areas; provided that, until September 1, 2012, certificates that have lapsed solely for the failure to pay a registration fee may be immediately reinstated upon payment only of any and all back fees. CCI supports this legislation as a way for teachers whose certification expired last summer, and who failed to pay their registration fees in the last six months of 2011, to avoid the \$500 or 9 semester hour requirement for certification reinstatement.

Administrative Issues

- CCI has been working with the Archdiocese of Chicago's Catholic Schools Office and the Illinois Coalition of Nonpublic Schools (ICNS) to influence ISBE's **waiver application from requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act**. Our primary goal is to ensure Title monies that are currently open to the equitable participation of nonpublic schools are not "flexed" or "set aside" into Title programs without equitable participation. We have communicated our interests to ISBE and the Governor's office, and in response, they included appropriate and helpful language in their waiver application (submitted Feb. 22, 2012).

Although this is a good first step, we know words on a page will not, by themselves, improve the consultation process between local school districts and Catholic schools. CCI's Department of Education, which is made up of the diocesan superintendents, has begun surveying Catholic schools to better understand the level of cooperation between public school districts and private schools. Please look for these inquiries and answer them as fully as possible, so we can accurately measure next steps.

Thank you for your attention to these matters, and your work in support of Catholic schools. May God bless your efforts and your students!

Zach Wichmann, Catholic Conference of Illinois
108 East Cook Street | Springfield, Illinois 62704
(217) 528-9200 | Fax (217) 528-7214