



Hello!

The beginning of March also brings on an increase of legislative activity in Springfield. The legislature has begun its spring session in earnest, and on behalf of Catholic schools, the Catholic Conference of Illinois (CCI) is pursuing several initiatives, opposing a few bills and monitoring others. Let's get right into it.

Legislative Issues

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.*

House Bill 6134 & Senate Bill 3908 (Textbook Block Grant Funding; K. Burke – D; Maloney – D) – These two 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 the newly designed textbook program. Considering the state's fiscal condition, which is necessitating further cuts in programs and very little if any restoration, it will be very difficult for these bills to move forward. We will use them 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. *CCI supports these bills.*

House Bill 3027 & House Bill 4616 (Comprehensive Sex Education; Lily -D) -- This legislation seeks to require programs of comprehensive sex education on public schools choosing to teach any form of sex education. The bill also 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." *CCI opposes this legislation.*

HB 5013 & SB 3405 (Immunization Data; Gabel – D; Steans – D) – This legislation seeks to require that on or before December 1 of each year, every public school district and registered nonpublic school make publicly available the immunization data they are required to submit to the State Board of Education by November 15. “Publicly available” is without definition so includes posting on the school’s web site or mailing to parents. The immunization data made publicly available must be identical to the data the school district or school has reported to the State Board of Education. *CCI is opposing this legislation as unnecessary.*

House Bill 5323 & Senate Bill 3367 (Driver’s Education; Pihos – R; Garret – D) – This legislation makes a number of changes to the Driver’s Education statute, including some changes for nonpublic school students. Under this legislation, nonpublic school students that take driver’s education in his or her district of residence will be treated the same as public school students in the district – this is not a change. However, if the student takes driver’s education in a school district in which they don’t live but in which their high school is located he or she will have to pick up the difference between “course costs” if their resident district course is cheaper than the district in which their school is located. This is the change, and it seems designed to prevent a school district from paying more for a nonpublic school student to take driver education in a different district than they would pay if he or she were taking the course in district. Obviously, if the student lives and goes to school in the same district this is not an issue. The bill also says that if a student takes a driver’s education class outside of both his or her resident district and the district in which his or her nonpublic high school is located, he or she must pick up the full cost of the course minus the state reimbursement. *CCI has surveyed a number of Catholic high schools, and these changes do not appear problematic; we will continue to monitor this legislation.*

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 9 semester hour requirement for certification reinstatement.*

Senate Bill 3415 (School Incident Reporting; Garret – D) – The legislation reaffirms that all school officials, including teachers, guidance counselors, and support staff, shall immediately notify the office of the principal in the event they observe any person who is a student in grade 6 through 12, or any person not a student, commit certain specified offenses (attacks on school personnel, firearms in schools and certain drug-related incidents) and says that upon receiving a report from any school official or from any other person, the principal or his or her designee shall immediately notify a local law enforcement agency and require a report to be completed. The change in the legislation is now the local law enforcement agency will be responsible for notifying state law enforcement instead of the school being responsible for such a report. *This legislation appears to streamline the current requirements, so CCI is monitoring this legislation.*

Senate Bill 3495 (Epinephrine; Schoenberg – D) – This legislation provides that a school district or nonpublic school shall (rather than may) authorize the provision of an epinephrine auto-injector to a student or any personnel authorized under a student’s Individual Health Care Action Plan, Illinois Food Allergy Emergency Action Plan and Treatment Authorization Form, or plan pursuant to Section 504 of the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 to administer an epinephrine auto-injector to the student, that meets the prescription on file. *CCI is monitoring this legislation.*

Senate Bill 3487 (MFSAB; Crotty – D) – This legislation allows multi-function school activity buses (MFSAB) to be used to transport students for any curriculum-related activity except for transportation on regular bus routes from home to school or from school to home. The bill states that MFSABs authorized to transport students under the new provisions must be operated by a holder of a school bus driver permit and is subject to certain provisions concerning contractual student transfer arrangements, contracts requiring school bus driver permits, liability insurance, and safety testing. *Although CCI has advocated allowing the use of MFSABs for transporting students to and from schools, we are supporting this smaller step.*

Administrative Issues

- 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. Principals have received registration information. 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. Please plan on participating in this important event.

- 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 the following language in their waiver application (submitted Feb. 22, 2012):

" Non-Public school advocates requested that the state emphasize that continued provision of equitable services for eligible Title I students attending nonpublic schools is an important consideration in the implementation of this waiver request. As a result, ISBE is reminding each LEA with Title I eligible children attending nonpublic schools to conduct timely and meaningful consultation with nonpublic school officials on the unmet needs of the nonpublic school students during the design and the development of the school district's Title I plan and before any decisions are made. No statutory or regulatory requirement related to the equitable participation of private school students, teachers, and families can be waived."

- CCI has been working with newly hired ISBE staff to **schedule state recognition visits** through the end of the school year, and this work has been completed. We prioritized new schools that are applying for the first time. Furthermore, the agreed administrative rule revisions on state recognition have gone through the public comment period without problem. The biggest changes are (1) state recognition will no longer only be good for the current school year, but will extend to December 31 of the next school year, ensuring enough overlap that schools will not lose recognition in the beginning of the school year, (2) all deadlines (immunization, state registration, state recognition application and calendar) will be due November 15 of each school year and (3) the seven year visit cycle has been changed to "periodic" visits.

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

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