



Catholic Conference
of Illinois

65 E. Wacker Place
Suite 1620
Chicago, IL 60601
Ph. 312-368-1066
Fx. 312-368-1090

108 E. Cook St.
Springfield, IL 62704
Ph. 217-528-9200
Fx. 217-528-7214

www.ilcatholic.org
Diocese of Belleville
Archdiocese of Chicago
Diocese of Joliet
Diocese of Peoria
Diocese of Rockford
Diocese of Springfield-in-IL

My November newsletter described the Catholic Conference of Illinois' (CCI) agenda for the upcoming legislative session. In December, the newsletter focused on the structure of our legislative action network and how the Catholic Conference of Illinois (CCI) works to influence state government. Today, the newsletter will primarily focus on one major policy proposal. We are committed to pursuing this initiative through a broad campaign led by a group known as Ed Choice Illinois. I also want to tell you how your school can become a partner in this great work.

As you know, the state's budget is in dire straits and serious questions of spending and taxation need to be addressed. However, even as these important issues are taken up, we must still advocate fairness and justice for the families currently choosing nonpublic schools as well as those desirous of a Catholic education but restrained by financial considerations.

Ed Choice Illinois has begun the Illinois Kids Campaign to push for legislation that provides tax credits to any taxpayer making donations to schools, organizations, and foundations in the public, charter, and nonpublic school sectors. The Catholic Conference of Illinois and the six Diocesan Offices of Education have joined, or soon will join, over 70 other community organizations, advocacy groups and schools in this campaign. By doing so, we have committed to giving priority to working on this issue.

Your school can also be a part of this campaign. If you believe the state should help parents choose the best education for their children, no matter where that is found, I invite you to join. You are already represented in the campaign through CCI, but by adding your logo, you can affirm your school's individual support for our cause. It costs nothing and requires no action other than what I will ask of you anyway in action alerts to come.

If you want to join this campaign in support of school choice, answer this email your intention and a digital copy of your school's logo. You will then be represented as a Catholic school both collectively – through CCI and your diocesan office – and individually through your school logo. Your school's logo will only be used in support of the specific legislation I am describing.

The full details of the Illinois Kids Campaign's legislative proposal are here:

The Quality Schools Tax Credit Act

The problem

- Teachers annually spend hundreds of dollars of their own hard-earned money buying supplies for their classrooms.
- The proration of General State Aid has caused many public schools to decrease or completely cut funding for important classes, programs, and extracurricular activities.
- High-quality charter schools are unable to expand because they lack access to district capital funds.
- High-income students have access to a high-quality education either through tuition at a private school or a mortgage in a high performing school district – many middle and low income students don't enjoy the same luxury.

The solution

- Provide public, charter, and private school teachers with a personal income tax credit for out-of-pocket purchases of classroom supplies.
- Allow corporations and individuals to receive a tax credit for donations to schools, organizations, and foundations in the public, charter, and private school sectors.

The details

- Up to \$250 nonrefundable teacher tax credit for the purchase of classroom supplies.
- Dollar-for-dollar state income tax credit up to 75 percent of an individual or corporation's tax liability based on the previous year's tax filing if they donate to:
 - Public or charter schools for education technology, music, arts, and sports programs;
 - District, public school, or charter school foundations;
 - Non-profit organizations that provide education-related supplemental services to public or charter schools;
 - Charter schools to pay for expansion costs; or
 - **Scholarship granting organizations that provide scholarships to low and middle-income students to attend private schools, with assurances that a majority of scholarships will be given to low-income students and students attending persistently low-performing or overcrowded schools.**
- The tax credits are capped at \$200 million – split evenly between the public and charter sectors and the nonpublic education sector.

I hope that the details of this proposal are as exciting to you as they are to me. The new scholarship foundations could work throughout the state to help the families of existing Catholic school students and bring new students to your school. I urge you to email me your school's logo and say you want to be counted as part of the Illinois Kids Campaign.

Action for Children

As you may have heard, the state's Child Care Assistance Program is experiencing funding shortfalls. A campaign has begun to support a supplemental funding bill. This campaign is being led by a group called Action for Children. Many parents who send their children to our schools utilize this program. If your school has such parents, you may be asked to participate by Action for Children, your diocesan office or CCI, but for now, this is a targeted campaign.

ADMINISTRATIVE UPDATE

State Recognition & the Illinois State Board of Recognition (ISBE) – ISBE has been able to hire new staff and has contracted with Illinois Service Center West 40 to help coordinate and conduct school visits. This year they are planning around 140 school visits. In November and December, ISBE sent letters to the schools they hope to visit this year. If your school has not been visited since 2009, you may be on the schedule; if so, you should have received a letter.

However, the new Governor has made moves to immediately clamp down on state expenditures and this includes travel. It is unclear yet how this may or may not affect school visits.

Teacher Licensure and Professional Development – We have finally reached agreement with the Illinois State Board of Education on their process of implementing new administrative rules in the areas of teacher licensure and professional development. Although the changes appear to impact nonpublic school teachers, the changes are primarily cosmetic.

First and foremost: the new rules DO NOT impede the licensure or licensure renewal of nonpublic school teachers. In fact, the new rules assist teachers in tracking their licensure status and professional development by allowing individual accounts in the Educator Licensure Information System (ELIS).

The rules DO make clear the licenses of teachers working in nonpublic schools are considered by the state to be “valid and exempt.” That is to say, the licenses held by nonpublic school teachers are valid but exempt from the state’s professional development requirements. It is important to note: the “valid and exempt” classification does not prevent nonpublic school teachers from engaging in professional development activities. The “valid and exempt” classification simply reflects long-standing state statute, which has never required teachers in nonpublic schools to be licensed or engage in professional development. Any existing licensing requirements in nonpublic schools are internal (e.g. from the diocese or school).

Moreover, a teacher is allowed to self-select licensure status in the ELIS system. One of the options is “valid and active.” So, a nonpublic school teacher may indicate in the ELIS system that his or her license is “valid and active” and voluntarily carry out and record the appropriate professional development. The state will still consider the license holder to be “valid and exempt,” but anyone viewing the account will see “valid and active.”

Second: the new rules DO NOT prevent nonpublic schools or their administrative offices from requiring professional development of their teachers or from designing and carrying out programs of professional development.

Last: The rules DO make it much more administratively burdensome for nonpublic schools and their administrative offices, as well as private vendors, to become “state approved providers of professional development.” Your school or diocese may no longer wish to take on the increased burden of maintaining an approved provider status. Remember, “approved provider status” is unnecessary to the provision of professional development to licensed teachers working in nonpublic schools.

Probably the worst that can be said of the new administrative rules is that they alter some nomenclature and perhaps affect perceptions. However, their substantive impact is minimal:

- Nonpublic school teachers can still be licensed and engage in professional development.
- Nonpublic school teachers have access to ELIS through which they can track their professional development activities and self-select their licensure status.
- Nonpublic schools and their administrative offices, whether seeking “approved provider status” or not, can still require and provide professional development.

Thank you and May God Bless you in your work.

Zach Wichmann
Director of Government Relations
Catholic Conference of Illinois
217-528-9200
wichmann@ilcatholic.org