

CATHOLIC CONFERENCE OF ILLINOIS
Catholic Schools Legislative Update

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STATE LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY

Textbook Funding – CCI found legislators in both chambers to reintroduce legislation providing funding for the textbook block grant (formerly textbook loan). The bills were House Bill 2321, introduced by Representative Kelly Burke (D-Oak Lawn), and Senate Bill 2152, introduced by Senator Bill Cunningham (D-Chicago). Throughout the session, we worked hard to line up co-sponsors; we have 23 co-sponsors in the House and 9 co-sponsors in the Senate.

On March 20, 2013, the Catholic school superintendents traveled to Springfield and met with Senate President John Cullerton, Speaker Mike Madigan, Minority Leader Christine Radogno and Minority Leader Tom Cross to discuss the general state of Catholic education and request funding for the textbook block grant. We followed this up with action alerts through the ICAN system to schools and parents in April and May, and in fact, the last week of session, we had a majority of the House Appropriations Committee committed to a yes vote. However, the budget emerged that same weekend without an appropriation for textbooks. Our hopes for restored funding relied heavily on the state freeing up money through significant pension reform, and when that did not happen, our path to success was blocked. We plan to take the summer to evaluate our advocacy efforts, the pension reform debate and a way forward.

School Choice Bills – Four school choice bills, two in the Senate and two in the House, were introduced this session:

- **House Bill 76** (LaShawn Ford [D] — Chicago)
- **House Bill 3102** (Joe Sosnowski [R] — Rockford)
- **Senate Bill 1248** (Matt Murphy [R] — Palatine)
- **Senate Bill 1777** (Michael Connelly [R] — Wheaton)

CCI supported all these efforts, although each bill has its strengths and weaknesses. Representative Ford's bill is limited to certain zip codes and relies on lottery proceeds; Representative Sosnowski's bill seeks to expand the tuition tax credit to \$1000; Senator Murphy's bill mirrors the Meek's bill of two years ago; and Senator Connelly's tax credit backed scholarship bill is closest to the policy formula we have been advocating. During the spring session, there was a subject matter hearing on Representative Ford's bill, Senator Murphy's bill lost in the Senate Education Committee 6 to 7, and the other two bills were not heard in committee.

School Choice Coalition – CCI has been very active in the formation of a new statewide coalition working to advance school choice in Illinois. The coalition is led by a group known as Freedom to Learn. So far, under Freedom to Learn, we have brought together every major school choice organization in the state and are attempting to expand our outreach into the business community. Freedom to Learn has hired an Executive Director to lead this work. The truth is that until we get a broader coalition organized and engaged school choice efforts are simply outgunned in Springfield. We need broader political, business and grassroots support, and we are making every effort to organize it. In the meantime, we keep the discussion of school choice alive in Springfield by supporting various school choice bills and talking to legislators about them.

Insurance Mandate for Student Athletes – Last November, CCI defeated a legislative initiative (House Bill 603) that would have imposed an expensive new mandate on public and nonpublic schools by requiring they purchase catastrophic health insurance plans for student athletes with

aggregate benefits of \$7.5 million or 15 years. These benefit limits are far in excess of what our school plans typically hold.

This issue resurfaced in the Illinois General Assembly through identical bills, House Bill 127 and Senate Bill 2178. On March 21st, CCI testified in opposition to House Bill 127 and the House Elementary and Secondary Education Committee voted the bill down. However, the Senate Bill was approved by the Senate Insurance Committee. CCI issued a letter to all State Senators explaining our opposition to the bill and lobbied against it. In response, the sponsor of the bill agreed to work out a compromise with us.

We agreed to the following compromise: a nonpublic high school will **either** provide their student athletes catastrophic insurance coverage in the amount of \$3 million in aggregate benefits or five years of coverage, whichever comes first, for injuries that result in medical expenses in excess of \$50,000 **or** the nonpublic high school can require athletes to have private insurance and be exempt from the coverage mandate.

We are told the Illinois High School Association already provides students with this type of catastrophic insurance for state tournaments. To extend this coverage for the entire season, officials estimate costs for schools to be less than \$5 per athlete. So, the choice of whether to require student athletes to have private insurance or purchase this insurance (which you could do from IHSA at probably a cheaper rate than whatever you have now) is completely up to schools.

House Bill 2944 – This legislation filed by freshmen Representative Scott Drury (D-Highwood) seeks to allow nonpublic school students to take the state’s standardized tests at the local public school if the student’s parent or guardian elects. The bill would also allow the local public school to charge a reasonable fee for administering the tests to nonpublic school students. The bill does not mandate participation in the state’s tests; however, the logistics of allowing our students to travel to the local public school for testing are a concern. Public school groups are opposing the bill. Our superintendents raised concerns about the bill, but not wishing to appear “scared” of the state test, we only monitored the bill, and it failed to advance out of the House.

House Bill 1625 – This legislation, sponsored by Jacqueline Collins (D-Chicago), amends the School Safety Drill Act to require that the one annual law enforcement drill already required focuses on a school shooting incident. The school will be required to invite a local law enforcement agency and try to work out a mutually agreeable date, but their participation is not mandatory.

School Safety Drill Act – This past December, ISBE and the State Fire Marshal’s Office proposed a new administrative rulemaking requiring state-recognized nonpublic schools to conform with a section of the School Safety Drill Act that we are exempt from in statute. The section in question requires an annual meeting with local first responders to evaluate the school’s crisis planning. CCI objected to the new rule-making due to the process. We do not believe administrative rulemaking, particularly rulemaking proposed under the auspices of the cooperative state recognition program, should be the source of new regulation not sanctioned in state statute. CCI organized opposition the initial public comment period and the proposed rules have been withdrawn. On March 26, CCI participated in a conference call with ISBE and State Fire Marshal representatives to discuss options for moving forward on this issue legislatively. All parties agreed to language to amend the School Safety Drill Act, but it was so late in session, we could not advance the issue legislatively. We plan to do so next session.

House Bill 3190 – This legislation, sponsored by Representative JoAnn Osmond (R-Gurnee) amends the School Code and the Communicable Disease Prevention Act and requires that, beginning July 1, 2014, upon entering the 6th and 12th grade of any public, private, or parochial school, a student shall present to the school proof of having received an (meningitis) immunization containing meningococcal conjugate vaccine. The bill passed and awaits the Governor’s signature.

House Bill 2675 – This legislation, introduced by Representative Camille Lilly (D-Chicago), seeks to require schools offering sex education to implement a curriculum of comprehensive sex education. The bill allows for the teaching of abstinence, but effectively prohibits abstinence-only education in public schools. The original bill deleted references to marriage in the context of abstinence and demanded the teaching of certain provisions of the Human Rights Act; however, in response to a failed vote fueled by our and other’s opposition, these provisions were removed via amendment. CCI opposed and provided testimony against the bill in the Senate Public Health Committee and House Human Services Committee, and in response, we were able to secure an amendment making clear the mandate does not apply to nonpublic schools. The bill did pass the House and Senate and awaits the Governor’s signature.

FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) – Responding to our many requests, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) finally agreed to implement a more practical timeline for identifying students with disabilities in nonpublic schools and engaging in timely and meaningful consultation with nonpublic school administrators and families.

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, the TMC timelines have been revised effective with the 2013-2014 school year:

- 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 nonpublic schools and their families. CCI has been proactive in alerting nonpublic schools.

ADMINISTRATIVE UPDATES

Teacher Licensure – As many of you know, ISBE launched a new educator licensure system July 1 and while it’s largely a technical change, it will impact everyone with certificates. In short, the state is moving from 60 types of educator certificates and endorsements to just three licenses. Educators will not lose any of their credentials or endorsements in this transition, there is no cost to educators

associated with this change and the difference in each individual's license will show up automatically on ISBE's website July 1. There will be more information in the coming weeks but you can learn more about this change on ISBE's Educator Certification page and specifically at this short webinar: <http://www.brainshark.com/IllinoisPrincipalsAssoc/isbeexchange>. I am told you will appreciate the simplicity of this new Educator License Information System, or ELIS, especially in comparison to the somewhat cumbersome certificate system of the current day.

State Recognition & ISBE – A number of nonpublic schools missed the new November 15, 2012, 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. CCI was able to work out a deal with ISBE ensuring those schools that missed the deadline were not stripped of state recognition. They were placed on a one year probationary status and as long as all submissions are made on time next year, they will be restored to full recognition.

About 35 state recognition visits to nonpublic schools have been scheduled for 2012-13 school year, and they are ongoing. ISBE has been working closely with the Nonpublic School Advisory Committee to plan a “surge” of recognition visits next school year. By contracting with retired educators and administrators (from primarily nonpublic schools) ISBE hopes to wipe out or greatly reduce the backlog in school visits. This potentially means hundreds of visits will occur next year. If your school has not been visited since 2006 or beyond, you would do well to prepare for a visit this school year.

LAP Network – CCI continues to work to maintain and expand the Catholic School Legislative Action Network. The network is organized around all Catholic schools in Illinois and includes participation of each school through the principal and at least one appointed legislative action parent (LAP). A school's LAP is placed in charge of coordinating and distributing legislative action alerts and leading the effort to build relationships with local legislators. The LAP network does not meet as a whole, but it does communicate and implement coordinated action through CCI. The LAP network is now being maintained on the I-CAN database.