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The 98th General Assembly has been going strong for about a month. The bill introduction deadlines have passed, and the committee hearing process has begun. Although it is possible for new bills to be introduced through what they call “shell bills” in the future, we now have a pretty good idea of the issues we will be facing going forward.

Before delving into some current legislative issues, I want to take a second to focus on school choice. Four school choice bills, two in the Senate and two in the House, have been 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 supports 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. To date, there has been a subject matter hearing (meaning no vote) on Representative Ford’s bill, and Senator Murphy’s bill lost in the Senate Education Committee 6 to 7.

We have communicated with the bills’ sponsors and also informed them of our efforts to expand a grassroots coalition in support of school choice. This 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. The truth is that until we get a broader coalition organized and moving 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 these bills in committees and talking to legislators about them. I hope to be able to share more progress with you soon.

LEGISLATIVE REPORT

ACTION ALERT FOR HIGH SCHOOLS: 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 student athletes has been reintroduced in the House and Senate.

These limits are far in excess of what our high schools currently carry and would incur significant new costs. The bills are **House Bill 127** and **Senate Bill 2178**. We have communicated our intention to oppose the bill to the House sponsor, and at this point it is unclear if the bill will move forward. There are several large public school advocacy groups also in opposition to the bill.

Still, it is important that our high schools 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 webs site at www.ilcatholic.org and click on Find Your Legislator or give us a call at 217-528-9200.

Textbook Funding – CCI has found legislators in both chambers to reintroduce legislation providing funding for the textbook block grant (formerly textbook loan):

House Bill 2321 (Kelly Burke (D) – Oak Lawn)

Senate Bill 2152 (Bill Cunningham (D) – Chicago)

We will be working hard to advance this issue even though the state's fiscal condition is bad. We believe this issue – especially in light of new textbook cuts in public school districts – is important and can resonate with policy makers. We have scheduled a lobby day of Catholic school superintendents, and they will be meeting with legislative leaders and the state superintendent on this issue.

ACTION ALERT FOR ALL SCHOOLS: I would also ask you to reach out to your state representative and state senator and ask them to co-sponsor the textbook funding bills. Make the case for textbook funding, describe how your school has gone without, talk of curriculum needs; in short, make a personal appeal to provide critical educational funding for students in all schools in Illinois. In time, I will provide a sample letter and easier contact methods, but in the beginning, your personal appeal, either through a phone call, email or meeting will be important. If I can help you on this, please call or email me. Again, if you do not know who your state representative or senator is (remember redistricting made a lot of changes) you can visit our webs site at www.ilcatholic.org and click on Find Your Legislator or give us a call at 217-528-9200.

ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

ISBE & State Recognition – Although we had a few issues with the November 15th 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.

Also, thank you to everyone who responded to my action alert on ISBE's proposed rule revision for state recognition and school crisis planning. I know that ISBE heard us, and we will be working on revisions to the proposed rules soon.

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 contact your school's state representative and senator concerning the textbook funding in **House Bill 2321** and **Senate Bill 2152**, and if a high school, contact your state legislator about **House Bill 127** and **Senate Bill 2178**.

Please also remember to distribute tuition receipts and ensure your parents are claiming the \$500 tuition tax credit in their tax filings!

As always, if you have any questions regarding these issues, please give me a call (217-528-9200) or send me an email (wichmann@ilcatholic.org). May God bless you and your work on behalf of Catholic schools.

Zachary Wichmann
Director of Government Relations
Catholic Conference of Illinois