



Catholic Conference  
of Illinois

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This last newsletter of 2014 will be geared towards preparing us for 2015. As you know, next year we will have a new Governor and a new General Assembly. We will also see significant changes in the executive agencies of state government, including the State Board of Education. We cannot know for sure what these changes will bring, but we do believe there will be new opportunities to pursue policies favorable to Catholic schools and their families.

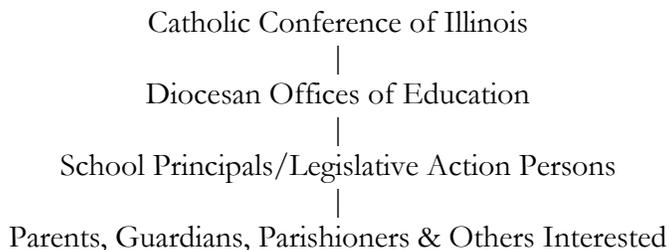
To prepare for this, we want to make sure our network of communication and grassroots activism is operational and effective. Our network relies on principals and legislative action people (LAPs). Schools were asked to appoint LAPs and most have. But now that principals have been notified and LAPs appointed, what do they do?

As has been explained in this newsletter for months, our network of electronic communication is now housed in the Illinois Catholic Advocacy Network (I-CAN) database. Through this system my office's ability to communicate with school principals and LAPs is much improved. Newsletters are more accessible, action alerts enjoy an improved design, and they are much easier to act on. In fact, after receiving an action alert through the I-CAN network, one can send a pre-drafted email to a state representative and state senator in as little as three clicks and under a minute.

Yet, there is more to this work than newsletters and emails. We want principals and LAPs to be leaders and coordinators of grassroots activity in support of our education agenda. As such, I am providing the following outline of our advocacy system, guidelines for how to operate and an explanation of our legislative agenda.

### **LEGISLATIVE ACTION NETWORK: STRUCTURE AND ROLES**

The organizational structure for the legislative action network is as follows:



#### **Catholic Conference of Illinois**

The Catholic Bishops of Illinois work together through the Catholic Conference of Illinois (CCI) on legislative matters important to the Church. CCI works with other like-minded religious and secular organizations to pursue legislative and administrative goals, and on education issues CCI relies on an Education Department – consisting of Illinois' six diocesan superintendents – for agenda-setting and coordination of advocacy efforts.

Zach Wichmann is CCI's Director of Government Relations and coordinates lobbying efforts. He maintains the database of Catholic schools and Catholic school legislative action persons on the Illinois Catholic Advocacy Network (I-CAN) database. His email address is [wichmann@ilcatholic.org](mailto:wichmann@ilcatholic.org).

### **Diocesan Office of Education**

The primary responsibilities of each Diocesan Office of Education within the network includes helping to ensure schools appoint LAPs, coordinating legislative action meetings and conferences, involvement in strategic planning, and helping to participate in, distribute and follow up on legislative action alerts from CCI. Each diocesan superintendent coordinates diocesan activity in the network.

### **School Principals and LAPs**

Each school principal should name a LAP(s) to help him or her facilitate legislative action initiatives locally. A LAP should:

- ensure he or she is hooked into the legislative action email network -- send email address to Zach Wichmann of the Catholic Conference of Illinois;
- create communication networks (phone, email, backpack mail) for school parents and parishioners to receive information on legislative developments and/or action alerts;
- be responsible for implementing legislative action alerts at his/her school, including organizing phone and/or email campaigns;
- keep the principal, pastor, and school board informed and working on important legislative issues;
- organize activities to increase the school's profile with local elected leaders – for example, organize candidate forums or visits from local office-holders; and
- ***build relationships with local legislators – invite them to visit the school!***

### **Political Activity Guidelines**

It is extremely important that your school, as a tax-exempt organization, follow state and federal guidelines regarding advocacy activities.

Your school MAY NOT:

- establish or support a political action committee;
- provide its membership lists to political parties or candidates on any basis;
- distribute campaign literature or biased voter education guidelines on property;
- use its publications to support, promote or endorse any particular party or candidate;
- make available its facilities to only one party or candidate.

Your school MAY and SHOULD:

- host nonpartisan voter registration drives;
- hold unbiased voter education forums with candidates for elected office;

- conduct advocacy campaigns on behalf of any issue consistent with the Church's position and Catholic social teaching;
- participate in advocacy for or against public policies that affect private schools in conjunction with CCI;
- ***build relationships with local legislators – invite them to visit the school!***

### **Legislative Agenda for Catholic Schools**

The Catholic Conference of Illinois' board recently approved our legislative agenda for the 99<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (which begins in January 2015 and will last two years). The agenda is as follows:

- Advocate for the creation of a Tax Credit Scholarship Program to empower parents to make the best educational choices for their children.
- Maintain a smooth and cooperative relationship between with State Board of Education and Catholic schools to ensure an effective state recognition program for nonpublic schools.
- Pursue and support other school choice options – such as voucher programs and/or for the expansion of the Education Expense Tax Credit – as opportunities exist.
- Monitor, shape and/or defeat new legislative or administrative proposals impacting nonpublic schools.
- Work to restore funding to the Textbook Block Grant, Educational Improvement and School Safety Block Grant and the Parent/Guardian Transportation Reimbursement programs.

Pursuing these goals will not inhibit our ability to become involved in other issues as necessary, but they will serve as guidance in planning and executing legislative strategies.

### **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. Last month, 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.

### **MARCH FOR LIFE**

Are you loving life? Then join the March for Life Chicago on January 18, 2015, at 2 p.m. for the largest pro-life event in the Midwest! Last year, over 2,000 Illinoisans from all across the state marched together hoping to call upon our religious, civic, and community leaders to renew every effort to build a nation that affirms the authentic dignity of women, the gift of children, and a culture dedicated to protecting life at every stage of development in law and love. For more information visit [www.IllinoisRightToLife.org/march-for-life-Chicago](http://www.IllinoisRightToLife.org/march-for-life-Chicago).

Thank you all for all that you do. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

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