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You may (or more likely may not) have noticed that I have not sent a newsletter since August. There are a number of reasons for this, but primarily: in the age of easily formatted and widely distributed email, I have noticed a great increase in the number of newsletters, letters, updates, etc. sent to school principals. I am not a principal, but I receive no fewer than five Springfield political newsletters every week. Who is able to read all that? No one. So, I have decided on a change.

CCI will no longer distribute a monthly newsletter on education issues. In its place, I will send periodic bulletins, like this one, to school principals and Legislative Action People (LAPs). These bulletins will not be sent on a regular schedule but only when there is important information to disseminate. You can expect a bulletin at this time of year, as the state recognition deadlines approach, in early June, when the legislative session typically closes, and in the spring when legislative events dictate.

My hope is that by limiting the number of electronic communications, you will have a burden relieved and may be more apt to read the bulletins when they do come.

In this bulletin, I will cover: (1) our school choice efforts; (2) an update on the child care assistance program; (3) a delay in the new concussion protocols for student athletes; (4) new protocols for vaccine exemptions; (5) state recognition deadlines with descriptions of a few changes for the upcoming year; and (6) a reminder to join the Illinois Coalition of Nonpublic Schools.

ILLINOIS KIDS CAMPAIGN

The Catholic Conference of Illinois (CCI) has spent the last year in close coordination with One Chance Illinois in efforts to advance school choice policy proposals. We are Tier 1 partners in their Illinois Kids Campaign. As such, we have aided in drafting the school choice legislation and in lobbying members of the General Assembly and administration.

The Invest in Kids Act has many components, but the priority provisions seek to provide tax credit fueled benefits to public, charter and nonpublic schools. The provisions geared towards our schools include:

- A dollar-for-dollar state income tax credit up to 100 percent of an individual or corporation's tax liability if they donate to scholarship granting organizations that provide scholarships to low and middle-income students to attend nonpublic schools.
- A \$100 million cap on the above tax credit.
- An increase in the Education Expense Tax Credit from \$500 to \$1000.

Everyone involved acknowledges the difficult politics of enacting these policy proposals in stand-alone legislation. Accordingly, we have maneuvered to have these ideas considered in the budget negotiations, and more specifically attached to any revenue (tax increase) proposals. We believe there is a strong possibility of securing some benefits in a larger package of fiscal reforms.

Of course, we did not anticipate the current budget standoff. The reality is our goal cannot be accomplished without an end to the budget impasse. We continue to work to ensure the tax credits will be included in the final budget, but until such time as the budget is seriously discussed, our progress is stalled.

CHILD CARE ASSISTANCE

The Child Care Assistance Program provides financial assistance to working parents, who earn less than 185 percent of the federal poverty level, to help pay for child care services. Qualified services include pre-school and before and after school care. Many of our schools receive money through the Child Care Assistance Program for providing these services.

In January, the Child Care Assistance Program, due to poor state budgeting and even worse spending practices, was short \$300 million for the remainder of the fiscal year (July 1, 2015). Because half the program is federally funded, the program did not disappear, but the payment cycle to providers was under threat of severe delays. There are currently about 176,000 enrollees in the program and 65 percent of them go to schools or day care centers.

CCI worked with a number of organizations to support either a supplemental funding bill or a grant of extraordinary powers to the Governor to move money into the program. We targeted the effort, asking schools who receive money through the program to contact their legislators. In late March, the General Assembly did grant the Governor power to sweep other state funds in order to fill the budget gap and meet this program's shortfalls. However, the program is again threatened with eligibility changes and funding cuts in the upcoming FY16 budget. We continue to monitor this.

CONCUSSION PROTOCOLS LIKELY DELAYED

This legislation marks the latest attempt by the General Assembly to regulate student athletes and concussions. It requires schools participating in interscholastic athletics create a concussion oversight team to establish "return to play" and "return to learn" protocols for students believed to have suffered a concussion.

These oversight teams should adopt the protocols established by the IESA or IHSA.

- The IESA protocols: <https://www.iesa.org/activities/concussion.asp>
- The IHSA protocols: <http://ihsa.org/Resources/SportsMedicine/ConcussionManagement.aspx>

However, Senate Bill 219, which delays the mandate for one year, recently passed the General Assembly. It is likely the Governor will sign the bill and the mandate will be delayed.

CHANGES TO IMMUNIZATIONS EXEMPTION

The enactment of Senate Bill 1410 reflects the desire of the General Assembly to tighten up exemptions to the state's required immunizations for students. Previously, parents could claim a documented medical exemption or a broader religious objection exemption. The religious objection exemption did not require the citation of a particular religion, teaching or practice.

Under the new law, parents or legal guardians claiming a religious exemption must present to the appropriate local school authority a signed Certificate of Religious Exemption detailing the grounds for objection and the specific immunizations, tests, or examinations to which they object. The

grounds for objection must set forth the specific religious belief that conflicts with the examination, test, immunization, or other medical intervention. The signed certificate shall also reflect the parent's or legal guardian's understanding of the school's exclusion policies in the case of a vaccine-preventable disease outbreak or exposure. The certificate must also be signed by the authorized examining health care provider responsible for the performance of the child's health examination confirming that the provider provided education to the parent or legal guardian on the benefits of immunization and the health risks to the student and to the community of the communicable diseases for which immunization is required. The certificate can be found here: <http://www.isbe.net/research/pdfs/immun-exam-gdlns-religious-exempt.pdf>

STATE RECOGNITION DEADLINES

ISBE has been able to employ new staff and contract with Illinois Service Center West 40 to help coordinate and conduct school visits. They conducted approximately 140 nonpublic school visits this past school year and hope to do a like number this year.

Please remember the **November 16, 2015**, deadline for submitting the Nonpublic Registration, Enrollment and Staff Report, and Immunization Data. The deadline for the Nonpublic School Application for State Recognition and School Calendar to be submitted has been pushed back to **November 30, 2015**. These deadlines cannot be missed.

There are a few new questions in these documents, including identifying the school districts your students come from and the need to provide evidence of a physical for new hires. Also, it is important to note that the manner in which the state recognition process will handle health/life/safety inspections is changing. No longer will the visiting team check building safety. Instead, the recognition team will ask to see the annual fire/safety inspection report and use that as evidence of compliance.

ILLINOIS COALITION OF NONPUBLIC SCHOOLS

Please consider joining the Illinois Coalition of Non-Public Schools (ICNS). In September, schools received either a letter to renew membership or an invite to become a member. ICNS works closely with CCI to influence both ISBE and the Illinois General Assembly. ICNS engages the services of a lobbyist to specifically represent the needs of all non-public school in the state. ICNS is also taking an active role in the Illinois Kids Campaign.

Please connect to the ICNS web site at www.icns.net to complete the membership form or respond to the membership letter you received.

Thank you all for the great work you do. If you have any questions, please call me at 217-528-9200 or email me at wichmann@ilcatholic.org.