

I hope this newsletter finds your school community well and eager for the season of Advent. May we all take advantage of this time of hope and renewal to become better attuned to God's will and our own spiritual needs.

Earlier this month, national and statewide elections were held that could significantly impact our work in the years to come. It is well worth our time for some analysis of that election.

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION:

Barack Obama beat Mitt Romney, 57% to 41% and won by nearly 900,000 votes. This is actually a pretty significant decrease from the President's victory in 2008 when he won nearly 62% of the vote.

CONGRESSIONAL ELECTIONS:

Democrats won 12 of 18 congressional races, defeating 4 Republican incumbents and winning 1 of 2 "swing" districts without incumbents.

STATE SENATE ELECTIONS:

Democrats won 40 of 59 seats, attaining a strong, veto-proof supermajority. In a testament to their control of, and prowess at, the redistricting process, the Democrats only defeated one Republican incumbent and still got to 40. They did win several "swing" districts.

There will be 16 new members (27%) in the Senate: 11 Democrats and 5 Republicans. Of the 59 Senate districts, 30 (51%) were won in uncontested general elections.

STATE HOUSE ELECTIONS:

Democrats won 71 of 118 seats, also attaining a veto-proof supermajority. The Democrats defeated 4 incumbent Republicans and won several "swing districts" including at least two in which the map supposedly favored Republicans.

There will be 27 new members (23%) in the House: 18 Democrats and 9 Republicans. Of the 118 districts, 69 (58%) were won in uncontested elections. In one contested election, a former state representative – expelled from the House only a few months ago due to bribery indictments – won reelection with 63% of the vote.

THE CATHOLIC VOTE:

According to national exit polls, Catholics supported President Obama 50% to 48%. In 2008, they supported the President 54% to 46%. In Illinois, the numbers were different: Catholics went for Romney, 51% to 48%, a switch from favoring the President 53% to 47% in 2008. Nationally, white Catholics supported Romney at 59%; Hispanic Catholics went Obama 75%, up from 72% in 2008. Catholics who attend Church weekly went for Romney at 57% while Catholics who do not attend Church weekly went Obama at 56%.

IMPACT ON CCI'S AGENDA

In the next General Assembly, Democrats will have the ability to pass any legislation they want without input from Republicans. Even issues of bonding and home-rule, which require a three-fifths majority, can now be approved without Republican support. Speaker Madigan and Senate President Cullerton could, and in select areas probably will, approve laws without regard to the Governor's position as their veto-proof margins give them that ability. One almost certain example of this will be gambling expansion. Moreover, issues such as making the 2010 tax increase permanent and state pension reform, which had been stalled due to Republican opposition, are now looking at very different futures.

While it is true that such large majorities can be unwieldy, it is also true that Democratic leaders will have a much easier time convincing fellow Democrats to vote their way than they would attempting to sway Republicans. It must also be noted that Democrats are becoming more uniform in their "progressive" positions.

The outcome of the 2012 elections will have a significant impact on CCI's agenda and legislative strategy over the next two years. While our positions on social service funding and immigration may be advanced, in the issue areas of protecting of the unborn, rights of conscience, school choice and defense of marriage we will encounter significant difficulties. Our committed advocacy in these areas and others must take the new political reality into account.

In order to prepare for these changes, I will again remind you that it is vitally important to ensure your school has appointed a Legislative Action Person (LAP) for the year. Every Catholic school should have already received a letter from me formally requesting this appointment along with a LAP Manual describing our advocacy system and the expectations for all. Your LAP may be the same person as appointed last year or someone new. You may appoint more than one LAP. The LAPs' primary responsibility will be disseminating this newsletter and any action alerts to your school and parish community. Many schools have success in appointing a serving board member as LAP, but whomever is chosen, please ask their commitment to the essential work of advocating for CCI's education agenda in service to your and all Catholic schools in Illinois.

Another encouraged LAP activity is the building of a relationship between school and local state representative and state senator. This is best done by inviting him or her into the school to observe the good work being done there.

LEGISLATIVE REPORT

The two-week November veto session began this week, and we had a good start Wednesday by helping defeat **House Bill 603** which would have mandated our high schools to carry much larger catastrophic insurance policies for student athletes at great cost. The legislation went down 41 to 68.

There is always the potential for more issues affecting Catholic schools to emerge, but I am not expecting much action at this time. I will, of course, monitor developments and keep you all informed as necessary.

CCI's legislative agenda for Catholic schools in next year's General Assembly has been set by the department and approved by the board:

- Advocate for the creation of an Individual/Corporate Tax Credit Scholarship Program and/or for the expansion of the Education Expense Tax Credit by raising the cap, increasing the percentage of qualified expenses and including refundability so that low-income families can benefit.
- Work to restore funding to the Textbook Block Grant, Educational Improvement and School Safety Block Grant and the Parent/Guardian Transportation Reimbursement programs.
- Maintain a smooth and cooperative relationship between the 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 – as opportunities exist.

Please be prepared, as principal and/or LAP, to participate in advocacy for issues that so significantly affect Catholic schools.

ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

ISBE & State Recognition – CCI continues to work with newly hired ISBE staff to schedule state recognition visits through the end of the 2012-13 school year. There are currently about 35 school visits scheduled for this year. We also ensured around 20 visits last year, prioritizing new schools applying for the first time, and we appeared to meet that need.

Senate Bill 2850 was signed by Gov. Pat Quinn on July 5, 2012. The bill has an effective date of June 30, 2013 and repeals Section 18-8.05 (F)(2)(b) of the School Code, which allows the first and last day of student attendance to be less than 5 instructional hours. So, beginning with the 2013-14 school year, days of attendance by pupils, including the first and last day of pupil attendance, shall be counted only for sessions of not less than five clock hours of school. This is a change: I know many of our schools schedule abbreviated first and last days, but if they want to count those days as attendance days beginning next year, they will have to be at least five clock hours.

IMPORTANT FORMS & DEADLINES

The **Nonpublic Registration, Enrollment and Staff Report**, student **Immunization Data** and the **Nonpublic School Application for State Recognition and School Calendar** were all due via the IWAS system on November 15th. Reminders were included in the last newsletter and in several email blasts. Hopefully, all our schools met the deadline. If there are any issues, please let me know as soon as possible.

If you have any questions regarding these issues, please give me a call (217-528-9200) or send me an email (wichmann@ilcatholic.org). There will be no newsletter in December, but we will be back at it near the end of January when the newly elected General Assembly gets underway. May God bless you and your work on behalf of Catholic schools.