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As the school year is well begun and the Illinois legislature is scheduled to return to Springfield this month for the annual Veto Session, the Catholic Conference of Illinois' (CCI) education e-newsletter is back. In an ongoing effort to improve accessibility and readability, we are distributing this e-newsletter through the Illinois Catholic Advocacy Network (I-CAN) – except in the Archdiocese of Chicago – and I promise to write as little as possible while still conveying important facts. Let's get started . . .

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

To read a complete update on the legislative activity of 2013, please go to our web site and read the report: http://www.ilcatholic.org/wp-content/uploads/Education_2013_Session_Report_.pdf. The following issues have seen updates during the summer months:

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, and we have 23 co-sponsors in the House and 9 co-sponsors in the Senate.

Unfortunately, the state's budget condition and the inability of the General Assembly to adopt any pension reform stymied our efforts to fund this program. However, we remain committed to advocating for this important program and will work as long and as hard as necessary to achieve success.

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 EdChoice Illinois. So far in this effort, we have brought together every major school choice organization in the state and are attempting to expand our outreach into the business community. EdChoice Illinois 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.

Insurance Mandate for High School Student Athletes – After CCI defeated several bills designed to implement an expensive new insurance mandate on high schools, CCI worked out a compromise with the legislative sponsors of **Senate Bill 2178** that will allow our schools to control or completely prevent additional costs.

Under the 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.

For those schools choosing the first option, the Illinois High School Association is offering the required health insurance at a cost under \$5 per athlete. For those choosing the exemption, they need to

provide IHSA a copy of their policy mandating student athletes have private insurance and they need to sign a sheet indemnifying IHSA (which was not part of the law but is a piece IHSA added after incorrectly interpreting the law and sending schools incorrect information.) The important point is the choice of whether to require student athletes to have private insurance or purchase this insurance is completely up to schools.

House Bill 1625 – This legislation (now law) amends the School Safety Drill Act to require that the one annual law enforcement drill already required focuses on a reverse evacuation scenario. It also clarifies that this drill is intended to “address and prepare” school personnel, meaning student participation is not required. A local law enforcement agency is required to contact the school about participating in the drill. If a mutually agreed upon date cannot be found, the school will conduct the drill without participation of the law enforcement agency. This is not a new drill, just a new focus for an existing drill.

House Bill 3190 – This legislation (now law) 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. Please note the effective date of this law is for next school year, not the current school year.

ADMINISTRATIVE UPDATE

State Recognition & the Illinois State Board of Recognition (ISBE) – Please remember the November 15, 2013, 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. These forms must be completed and submitted on time in order to extend your school’s state recognition status from December 31, 2013 to December 31, 2014. The deadline cannot be missed.

Nonpublic Registration, Enrollment and Staff Report – This report is scheduled to become available on the IWAS system on October 1, 2013. Completed reports must be received by ISBE no later than November 15, 2013. Nonpublic schools that have registered with ISBE at least once in the past must submit their data online via IWAS. Schools that have never registered must submit their data using paper form: http://www.isbe.net/research/htmls/np_entity.htm.

Immunization Data Report -- This report is scheduled to become available on the IWAS system on October 1, 2013. Completed reports must be received by ISBE no later than November 15, 2013.

Nonpublic School Application for State Recognition and School Calendar – This IWAS system is scheduled to open on IWAS on October 8, 2013 and be due November 15, 2013. As was the case last year, ISBE will include an affirmation checklist in the application that was typically part of the probe document. My office sent guidance to you on how to complete the checklist last year. If you need the guidance again, please let me know.

PLEASE REMEMBER that the order in which these forms are done is important! The immunization data and the Nonpublic Registration, Enrollment and Staff Report must be completed and submitted BEFORE the Nonpublic School Application for State Recognition and School Calendar can be submitted on IWAS.

You need to also know that ISBE has been working closely with the Nonpublic School Advisory Committee to plan a “surge” of recognition visits later this 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 many visits could occur this school year, although ISBE is already significantly behind in their original timeline. If your school has not been visited since 2006 or beyond, you should know a visit is possible this year.

Illinois Catholic Advocacy Network (I-CAN) – CCI has adopted this new technology to improve our advocacy efforts in Springfield across the board. Our Principal and Legislative Action Person (LAP) email lists are now housed in this database and our action alerts are better designed and MUCH easier to act on. In fact, after receiving an action alert through the I-CAN network, you will now be able to send a pre-drafted email to your state representative and state senator in as little as three clicks and under a minute. It can't be beat!

I-CAN is a grassroots advocacy email network, and the best news is you do not have to be a principal or LAP to sign up for ICAN. If you care about Catholic schools (or any other issues the Church speaks on), you can sign up today and be an informed and active participant. When signing up for I-CAN you will be asked for both an email address and home address so we can pinpoint your state lawmakers. You will also be allowed to sign up for specific issue areas, so that you can receive alerts on issues you care about and not for those you don't.

Please click <http://capwiz.com/ilcatholic/mlm/signup/>, and fill out the form. CCI does the rest. Thank you for this important help – it is our only method for influencing public policy debates in Springfield.

Blue Ribbon Schools – Just last week, the United States Department of Education promulgated its list of Blue Ribbon Schools for 2013. Founded in 1982, the National Blue Ribbon Schools Program recognizes public and private elementary, middle, and high schools where students perform at very high levels or where significant improvements are being made in students' academic achievement. In Illinois, eight Catholic schools were awarded the Blue Ribbon:

- Northside Catholic Academy – Chicago, IL
- Our Lady of Mount Carmel Academy – Chicago, IL
- Queen of Angels School – Chicago, IL
- St. Andrew School – Chicago, IL
- St. Francis Xavier Elementary School – LaGrange, IL
- St. Joan of Arc School – Evanston, IL
- St. Michael School – Orland Park, IL
- St. Norbert School – Northbrook, IL

Congratulations to those schools for this important recognition and to all of you for the successful start of new school year!

Zach Wichmann
Director of Government Relations
Catholic Conference of Illinois