



# CCI January Newsletter 2010

*Hello All:*

Hopefully, the first Catholic Conference of Illinois (CCI) Education Newsletter of 2010 finds you well and your school's preparations for Catholic School's Week almost complete. A lot has transpired since the last newsletter, including (1) continued advocacy for restoring funding to important education programs, (2) ongoing preparations for Catholics at the Capitol, and (3) continued work with Senator Meeks, chairman of the Senate Education Committee, on new school choice legislation. So let's get right to it.

## Legislative Update

**Grant Funding** – Since last July, CCI has undertaken a focused effort aimed at convincing the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) to include funding for the Textbook Loan, Parent Transportation Reimbursement and ADA Block Grant in their budget recommendation for the next fiscal year. We gave testimony twice at regular ISBE meetings and at all eight of their statewide budget hearings. We met with the State Superintendent, the Chairman of ISBE and provided a great amount of supporting materials to staff and all nine state board members.

Unfortunately, ISBE was not sufficiently responsive. Although ISBE included funding for the ADA Block Grant in their budget recommendation, they did not recommend any funding for the Textbook Loan or Transportation Reimbursement programs. Obviously, the state's fiscal condition is terrible. Bills are being paid months late and the budget hole for next year could be as high as \$12 billion. Still, it is difficult to understand ISBE's decision to recommend these programs be cut completely. The cuts recommended disproportionately target programs that provide financial assistance to public and nonpublic schools. ISBE seems to have decided their obligation was to programs serving only public schools despite their strategic goals which cite service to "all schools" and "all students."

There is good news. ISBE's budget recommendation is only a recommendation. The Illinois General Assembly will make the final budget decisions, and as its members are elected officials, they are much more likely to be responsive to our strong advocacy than were state bureaucrats. **The spring legislative session begins in earnest the first week of February. At that time, you will receive an action alert requesting letters, phone calls and personal visits with legislators.** CCI will provide talking points and sample letters. Sometime during the session, I will also contact principals in targeted districts to ask for additional help. Understanding and respecting the demands on your time; any requests made will be quick and easy.

We are fighting powerful tides. The state's fiscal condition will probably force significant cuts to state programs across the board. ISBE has taken a stance against Textbook Loan and Parent Transportation Reimbursement. To accomplish our goals, a strong response from your schools, families, and parishioners will be required. CCI is prepared to meet this challenge and stands ready to provide you all the information and support necessary to a successful campaign. To prepare your families, I ask that you send this newsletter, or a summary of it, home with all your parents prior to or during Catholic Schools Week. We need their engagement!

**Catholics at the Capitol** - With the work ahead in mind, please remember and plan for your school's participation in the second annual *Catholics at the Capitol*. The event will be held on March 3, 2010. Every Catholic school in the state should be represented on this important day. I have already mailed to every Catholic school an informational packet including a promotional flyer and a registration form for school representatives. You can also find the promotional flyer here:

<http://www.catholicconferenceofillinois.org/bins/site/ftp/english%20flyer%20from%20Rudin.pdf>

And the registration form here:

<http://www.catholicconferenceofillinois.org/bins/site/ftp/formforschoolreps.doc>

Students will not be involved this year. It is adults only. We do ask that every Catholic school try to send a small contingent of parents, parishioners, staff, school board members or even the pastor to the *Catholics at the Capitol*. It is vitally important: no one else will be there to talk about education issues to your state representative and senator. If you want to see the Textbook Loan Program restored, the School Safety Block Grant increased, the Parent Transportation Program back on line, and the Education Expense Tax Credit increased, please identify and send a contingent from your school to help lobby lawmakers.

**School Choice** - CCI continues to work closely with State Senator James Meeks (D-Chicago) on drafting and introducing legislation to create pilot school choice program in Chicago. We have offered him ideas on vouchers and on the establishment of a corporate tax credit to fund scholarships programs for low and middle income families. Senator Meeks represents many of the people our system of public education has failed. His conversion to the belief that providing parents more choices is essential to education reform contains the potential to cause more policymakers to take a long look at the great opportunities Catholic schools provide. I hope to be able to inform you of Senator Meek's introduced school choice legislation very soon.

**Federal Title and IDEA Funding Distribution** - Working with Notre Dame's Alliance for Catholic Education (ACE) program, CCI has proposed to ISBE the possibility of establishing an alternative model for determining and distributing federal grant dollars for services entitled to Catholic schools and their students. ISBE's initial response has been to include the issue, via Senate Bill 1882, in their newly formed Streamlining Illinois' Educational Delivery Systems Task Force. In the meantime, we continue to push ISBE to ensure public school districts are

living up to their obligations to ensure private school participation in federally funded NCLB and IDEA programs.

**Senate Bill 138 & House Bill 643 (Expanding the Tuition Tax Credit from \$500 to \$1000)** - Due to the state's budget situation, we have been unable to push these bills forward in the committee process. However, we have continued to add co-sponsors - 13 members in the House and 9 members in the Senate - and we use these bills as topics of conversation with the leadership in the General Assembly and with the Governor's office. As mentioned, language expanding the Tuition Tax Credit from \$500 to \$1000 was included in legislation, House Bill 174, increasing personal income tax and expanding Illinois' sales tax. CCI remains committed to ensuring Catholic school families are represented in any new tax bill.

**House Bill 3982 (Transportation of Students)** - This legislation eliminates the use of 11-15 passenger vans for interscholastic or other school sponsored non-curriculum related activities by July 1, 2010. The new law will bring Illinois schools into compliance with federal standards for transporting students by eliminating vans that have been deemed unsafe by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Non-curriculum related activities do not include transportation from home to school and from school to home or a trip directly related to regular credit-earning curriculum. As of July 1, 2010, students grade 12 and below will be required to be transported in a school bus, multifunction school-activity bus (MFSAB), or First Division Vehicle (vehicles designed by the manufacturer to transport 10 or fewer persons) for these events.

## Administrative Update

**Important Dates** - Most likely, your school has already submitted the following documents and data, but just in case, I wanted to include the deadlines for each. In most cases, a school principal can check ISBE's IWAS system to check the status of these reports.

- 1) Nonpublic School Registration, Enrollment and Staff Report: 12/31/09
- 2) Student Health Data - Immunization: 11/16/09 (system opened 10/16/09)
- 3) Student Health Data - Vision: 6/30/10 (system opened 10/16/09)

\* Please remember children must receive physical examinations prior to entering Illinois schools for the first time, prior to the date of entering kindergarten or first grade, prior to entering sixth grade, and prior to entering ninth grade. The immunization requirements, K-12, can be found here:

[http://www.isbe.net/research/pdfs/immunization\\_requirements.pdf](http://www.isbe.net/research/pdfs/immunization_requirements.pdf)

**State Recognition** - The new administrative rules for the governing state recognition of nonpublic schools are complete. I am happy to report we were successful in shaping these rules to meet our needs and expectations. In February, the Nonpublic School Advisory Committee will be meeting with ISBE staff to begin revisions to the probe document (used in state recognition visits) to match the new rules. The new probe document will probably not be used in the field until next school year. CCI will work with the diocesan offices of education to ensure you are kept informed and aware of any coming changes.

**Illinois Coalition of Nonpublic Schools (ICNS)** - ICNS has committed to working side-by-side with CCI to restore funding to the Textbook Loan, ADA Block Grant, and Parent Transportation Reimbursement programs. As a member of the ICNS board, I participated in the interview process for the hiring of a contract lobbyist for the spring session. ICNS has hired a contract lobbyist who will provide critical assistance to our efforts, and the non-Catholic members of ICNS should be congratulated for agreeing to and participating in this important step. I again ask that your school consider joining ICNS if not already a member. A membership form can be found on their web site - [www.icns.net](http://www.icns.net) - and the cost is only \$50 a year.

**Facebook Page for Catholic School Advocacy** - Always hoping to improve our system and methods of communication, and eager to invite more into new technologies, I have begun a Facebook page for Catholic School Advocacy in Illinois. Facebook users simply need to look up the page at

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Springfield-IL/CCI-Catholic-School-Advocacy-in-Illinois/124415842483?created>

or do a search on Facebook of Catholic School Advocacy. Being a fan of the page will allow you to receive real time updates and action alerts, links to pertinent articles and videos and access to the monthly newsletter. Sign up as a fan today!

Please enjoy a successful and invigorating Catholic School's Week. These days offer many challenges to Catholic schools, but our continued reliance on God and commitment to success will see us through to better days. You will be hearing more from CCI soon. Thank you for your continued attention.

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