

Hello all:

The following is an action alert regarding state assistance for nonpublic schools. The Catholic Conference has recently met with the Governor, the House Speaker, the Governor's budget chief, key members of the State Senate, and the State Superintendent. Our purpose was to seek help for nonpublic schools in the fiscal year 2008 budget, possibly in the forms of expanding the tax credit, reimbursement for state mandates, and more money for Textbook and Transportation programs. After these meetings, **WE THINK THIS CAN BE DONE!**

I am asking that every Catholic school (and all nonpublic schools) conduct a letter-writing campaign in support of state assistance to nonpublic schools. The time is now. If there is a large increase in education spending in Illinois, as appears likely, nonpublic schools must not be left out. Our ideas for assistance are included in the sample letter I have attached and in the fact sheet, sample letter, and bulletin insert found on our web site:

www.catholicconferenceofillinois.org

If you are a Principal or LAP, please ask the parents and staff of your schools to use these materials to write your state representative and state senator. We need the letters to be sent over the next three weeks. Phone calls are not appropriate at this point because we are dealing with a budget issue and not a specific bill. **WE NEED A LOT OF LETTERS BASED ON THE SAMPLE LETTER ATTACHED AND THE MATERIALS ON OUR WEB SITE.**

You can find the name and contact information of your state senator and representative on the web site of the Illinois General Assembly - www.ilga.gov - or you can call the Catholic Conference of Illinois at 217-528-9200 or 312-368-1066. This information can also be accessed through our web site under Legislative Update; Find Your Legislator.

Thank you, and please let me know if you need any more help or information.

Zach Wichmann
Catholic Conference of Illinois
Associate Director for Education
217-528-9200

Or locally you can contact Mary Ann Frank @ mafrank123@sbcglobal.net or Rena Schultz @ rschultz@dioceseofjoliet.org

DATE

ADDRESS
ADDRESS
ADDRESS

SALUTATION:

I write today to urge your support for increased funding for education in Illinois and that the term “education” not be confined to the public school system. If there is a major reform and increase in education spending in Illinois, nonpublic schools and the families that choose them deserve similar support.

Nonpublic schools contribute greatly to Illinois’ educational system, and they save taxpayer money. In the 2005-06 school year, there were 1,220 registered nonpublic schools in Illinois and 257,194 students enrolled in them.

- At the FY 07 foundation level of \$5,334, nonpublic schools save the state of Illinois almost \$1.4 billion.
- At the foundation level proposed in Senate Bill 750 (\$5,952), nonpublic schools would save the state of Illinois over \$1.53 billion.
- This does not include the millions of dollars nonpublic schools save local governments. For instance, the City of Chicago reports spending \$9,758 per pupil in FY 05-06; at that rate, the 47,345 students of Chicago’s Catholic schools (not all nonpublic schools) would save the city – subtracting the state foundation level – almost \$210 million a year.

The state has a keen interest in helping parents choose the best education for their children and in ensuring the existence of more than one viable education system. Any bill or proposal, like Senate Bill 750, that proposes an overhaul of the financing of education in this state must include some benefit to nonpublic schools and the families that choose them. Ideas for assistance to families choosing nonpublic schools include:

- **Education Expense Tax Credit** – The Illinois Education Expense Tax Credit, against Illinois’ income tax, is 25% of qualified education expenses – tuition, book fees and lab fees – over \$250. However, the tax credit cannot exceed \$500. The following improvements of the tax credit should be advocated for:
 - The tax credit should be made refundable to assist low-income families.
 - The percentage of expenses eligible should be increased from 25 to 50%.
 - The capped amount of the tax credit should be raised from \$500 to \$750.

Even if all of these provisions were adopted and the total of tax credit claims doubled, the state would only experience *approximately a \$70 million revenue loss*.

- **School Safety and Educational Improvement Block Grant** – Every year the state imposes new unfunded mandates on nonpublic schools. Recent mandates include requiring

Automated External Defibrillators and staff training, new school drill requirements, a crisis plan and an annual review of its contents, food service restrictions and pending legislation requiring fingerprint based background checks for new employees of nonpublic schools. These mandates are imposed with fine intentions, and recognizing their importance, the nonpublic school community has not opposed any of them. However, none of these state mandates are funded by the state. This should change by opening the School Safety and Education Improvement Block Grant, which funds many of these mandates in public schools, to nonpublic schools. *The grant program is currently funded at \$74,841,000; we estimate an additional \$38 million would cover nonpublic schools at an adequate level.*

- **Reimbursement for Administrative Services** -- Another way to offset the costs of mandates, broader even than just those dealing with school safety, an administrative services reimbursement program could be established by which the state superintendent, in accordance with rules adopted by the state board of education, shall annually reimburse each state recognized nonpublic school for the actual mandated service administrative and clerical costs incurred by such school during the preceding school year in preparing, maintaining, and filing reports, forms, and records, and in providing such other administrative and clerical services that are not an integral part of the teaching process as may be required by state law or rule or by requirements duly promulgated by federal, city, exempted village, or local school districts. *We estimate \$38 million would cover these mandates in nonpublic schools.*

- **Textbook Loan Program** – The Illinois Textbook Loan Program provides textbooks, textbook substitutes, and since 1996, instructional computer software to public and nonpublic students grades K-12. Unfortunately, the program’s funding has never been sufficient to cover all Illinois pupils' textbook needs. Still, it is the only line item in the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) budget that provides universal help to all students (public and nonpublic) in Illinois. Funding for this program should be increased to serve more grades per year (from a three year to two year cycle) and to raise the per pupil allocation, currently around \$35 a pupil. *Doubling the funding for this line item would cost the state \$30 million.*

- **Parent/Guardian Pupil Transportation Reimbursement Program** – The Illinois Parent/Guardian State Pupil Transportation Reimbursement Program is designed to provide financial assistance to Illinois’ parents/guardians of children, grades K-12, to whom free bussing is not provided. This program’s funding is part of the annual appropriation process, varies from year to year, and does not meet the costs parents assume in transporting their children to school, especially considering the recent spike in gas prices. Funding for this program should be significantly increased to raise the allocation from roughly \$140 a year per applicant to \$280 a year. *Doubling this line item would cost the state \$16 million a year.*

None of these ideas would require funding anywhere near the amounts being allocated to public schools, yet all of them would be of great value to nonpublic schools, many families, and this state’s educational system. I ask that you actively support the inclusion of some state assistance to nonpublic schools in any major education funding reform or increase that moves through the General Assembly this year. Thank you.

Sincerely,