



## **The Connecticut Federation of Catholic School Parents**

### **2011 Legislative Priorities for The Connecticut Federation of Catholic School Parents**

The State of Connecticut is fortunate to have excellent private and religious schools. However, due to preconceived notions about public versus private education the doors to these fine education institutions remain closed to many children. Too many children, especially poor minority children, continue to be denied a chance for a quality education.

Almost 38,000 students attend over 130 Catholic schools in Connecticut. Despite the varying economic and social background of our students, most of these students are academically successful. The standardized tests used by Catholic schools indicate above satisfactory results. The high school graduation rate of our schools is approximately 99%. This same 99% of students continue onto some form of higher education or military services.

Parochial schools have long provided parents an alternative to public education at a very reasonable cost, even though many parents make a difficult financial decision to send their children to Catholic school. The average tuition for a child to attend a Catholic school is \$4,755, while the cost to educate a public school student is in excess of \$12,000 per pupil. Catholic schools save the taxpayers of Connecticut over \$400 million per year. However, many Catholic schools are facing financial demands and it would be unfortunate if more of our schools were to close.

All levels of Government should enact policies that assist these schools in educating Connecticut's children. Private and religious schools can be useful in helping our nation address its educational concerns.

The Connecticut Federation is proposing the following initiatives to help ensure future access to private and religious schools for lower and middle class families.

## **State Level**

### **Tax Credits for Corporations that Donate to a Scholarship Fund**

- The Connecticut Federation of Catholic School Parents supports legislation that would allow C corporations to donate funds to a fund that would provide scholarship aid to lower and middle income families, from distressed municipalities, to attend a private or religious school.
- The corporation tax credit would have a statewide cap of \$2 million and tax credits would be granted on a first come first serve basis. The tax credit would be capped at \$50,000 per corporation. Scholarships would be capped at \$2,500 per student.
- Scholarships would only be given to children whose family income does not exceed 250 percent of the income requirements of the federal poverty line. (A family of four would have an income of less than \$55,125 per year.)

### **Interdistrict Transportation**

- The Connecticut Federation of Catholic School Parents supports legislation that would allow interdistrict transportation to parochial and private schools. Interdistrict transportation would address the issue of racial isolation within our urban areas.
- The Connecticut Federation of Catholic School Parents supports expansion of Connecticut's Open Choice Program to include religious and private schools. If there are open seats on a bus transporting children to a public school, these seats should be allocated to children attending nonpublic schools.

### **Repeal of Provision Eliminating Experience Teaching in a Nonpublic School for Purpose of Issuing a Professional Educator Certificate**

- The Connecticut Federation of Catholic School Parents supports the repeal of the provision in Public Act 09-1 that eliminates the ability of nonpublic school teachers to obtain a professional educator certificate.
- Public Act 09-1 passed during the June 19, 2009 Special Session of the Connecticut General Assembly and would become effective July 1, 2012. The provision was implemented without consultation of private or religious schools.

### **Permit College Students to Obtain State Certification by Student Teaching in Private or Religious Schools**

- The Connecticut Federation of Catholic School Parents supports legislation that would allow college students to student teach in a private or religious school setting
- Currently student teachers are not allowed to obtain state certification in Connecticut's private and religious schools. Massachusetts and New York allow student teachers to obtain certification at Catholic schools.
- The student teaching experience is one of the most important components of the teacher certification process. Allowing college students to student teach in a private or religious school setting would provide them with the skills to serve others and further the values and practices of their profession.

## **Local Level**

### **Textbook Loan**

- The Connecticut Federation of Catholic School Parents supports textbook loan programs at the local level. During the past four years, over \$500,000 has been allocated by municipalities to fund textbook loan programs for private and religious schools. The Connecticut Federation of Catholic School parents, working with our Catholic schools, have been instrumental in procuring these funds.
- The Federation sent a questionnaire to candidates running for municipal office during the 2009 election and has been able to identify elected officials that are supportive of this program or continuing it. The Federation has identified 15 municipalities to work with to secure funding for a textbook loan program.

### **Nursing Coverage**

- The Connecticut Federation of Catholic School Parents believes all Catholic Schools should receive the same nursing services as public schools. The General Statutes of Connecticut, Chapter 169, Section 10-217 (a), state that each town or regional school district which provides health services for children attending its public schools in any grade, from kindergarten to twelve, inclusive, shall provide the same health services for children in such grades attending private nonprofit schools.
- Unfortunately, many municipalities have used a C-9 opinion letter issued by the Connecticut Department of Education that stated nursing coverage for private and religious schools only had to be comparable. The same letter also stated local municipalities should conduct a health assessment at each non-public school to determine how many hours of nursing coverage should be provided.
- The Connecticut Federation has identified 13 municipalities where we plan to pursue additional nursing services for the 2010-11 school year.

### **Federal Funds from the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)**

- The Connecticut Federation of Catholic School Parents will work with Connecticut's Catholic Schools to ensure they are receiving adequate federal funding.
- Under the provisions of ESEA, it is required that private and religious schools receive funding for:
  - Title I: Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged
  - Title II-A: Teacher Training
  - Title II-D: Education Technology
  - Title IV: Safe & Drug-Free Schools
- In addition, private and religious schools are eligible for funds under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).
- In a survey of our Catholic school principals, the Connecticut Federation of Catholic School Parents has identified 25 municipalities where there are questions about federal funds to our schools. The Federation will work with Catholic schools from these municipalities to ensure our schools are receiving adequate funding.

## **Opportunity Scholarships**

- The Connecticut Federation of Catholic School Parents supports allowing local municipalities the option of providing opportunity scholarships to students to attend a private or religious school.
- Sec. 10-239a of the Connecticut General Statutes allows municipalities, under the Demonstration Scholarship Program Authorization Act of 1972 to provide scholarships. The purposed of the program is to test education scholarships as a way to improve the quality of education in Connecticut.
- Six local municipalities must be willing to participate in the program and no state funds may be allocated for this program.

## **Busing – Catholic High Schools**

- The Connecticut Federation of Catholic School Parents supports interdistrict transportation for Catholic High School students if there is no additional cost to the local municipality.
- Sec. 10-277 of the Connecticut General Statutes allows municipalities to provide transportation, which is transporting students to a public high school, to furnish transportation to nonpublic high school students.

## **Pupil Services for Catholic Elementary Schools**

- The Connecticut Federation of Catholic School Parents supports municipalities providing more pupil services to our students who need extra attention to succeed in school.
- These services would include ESL, speech therapy, psychological services and special education. Thirteen states currently provided these services on a limited basis.

## **National Level**

### **Reauthorization of No Child Left Behind**

- The Connecticut Federation of Catholic School parents will continue to work with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and the staff of the Education Committee on the reauthorization of No Child Left Behind (NCLB).
- NCLB was supposed to be reauthorized in 2008. With a possibility of a Republican takeover of Congress, it's unclear if reauthorization will be an immediate focus. .
- After discussion with the USCCB it appears Members of Congress are waiting for the Obama administration to introduce a proposal. It is very likely the administration will redefine NCLB as far as judging standards for schools and teachers.
- The Federation will monitor the following issues concerning NCLB reauthorization.
  - Equitable treatment of Catholic Schools
  - Adequate Funding for Title Programs
  - Initiation of common standards for Catholic Schools