

Legislative Action Manual

ARCHDIOCESE OF CHICAGO



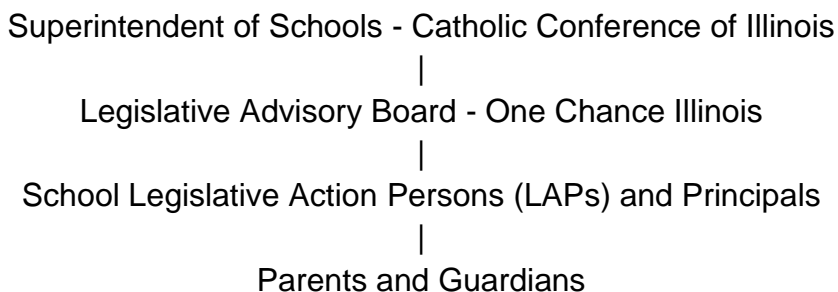
Legislative Advisory Board
2016

The Legislative Advisory Board of the Archdiocese of Chicago Office of Chicago Schools has organized a structure for supporting legislative initiatives deemed beneficial for Catholic schools. The following is a diagram and a short description of the legislative action network, the role of each of its parts, guidelines on political activities, a short recap of the successes Catholic School advocacy has achieved in Illinois and guidelines for letter writing and forums.

Please take time to review this document and ensure your school participates fully in this important endeavor.

Legislative Action Network: Structure and Roles

The organizational structure for the Archdiocese of Chicago legislative action network is as follows:



Catholic Conference of Illinois

The Catholic bishops of Illinois work together through the Catholic Conference of Illinois (CCI) on legislative matters that relate to the Church. There are CCI offices in both Springfield and Chicago. CCI works with other like-minded religious and secular organizations to pursue legislative and administrative goals.

Zachary Wichmann is the CCI Director of Government Relations and coordinates educational lobbying efforts. Mr. Wichmann requests that all Catholic schools, and their Legislative Action Person(s), are on his email address list, in addition to being on the Office of Catholic School's list. To contact him, please email him at wichmann@ilcatholic.org.

One Chance Illinois

One Chance Illinois is the broad coalition which is sponsoring the Illinois Kids Campaign legislation. The Illinois Kids Campaign legislation is an educational tax credit that helps increase educational funding by allowing taxpayers to direct their tax dollars toward education providers who serve low and middle income families.



The bill provides a \$200 million dollar statewide education fund:

- \$100 million to public schools for arts, sports and rebuilding school facilities
- \$100 million to K-12 school scholarship programs in which our Catholic school families can participate

The bill also provides:

- A \$250 tax credit for teachers' out-of-pocket classroom expenses
- An increase in the existing tax credit for families from \$500 to \$750 in the first year and \$1,000 in the second year

Legislative Advisory Board

The Legislative Advisory Board, which oversees the LAP, principal and parent/guardian network, is comprised of Archdiocesan school professionals and regional lay representatives from Cook and Lake Counties. The board's primary role in maintaining the network includes coordinating legislative education, strategic planning and action initiatives for the Archdiocese. The Board collaborates with both the Catholic Conference of Illinois and the One Chance Illinois (OCI) coalition. The OCS Board encourages schools to join the OCI coalition, sharing their school logo and supporting OCI initiatives.

School Legislative Action Persons (LAPs)

Each school should name one or two LAPs who will facilitate legislative action initiatives locally. A LAP should:

- Ensure he or she is connected to the legislative action email network
- Send email address, phone and home address to Sue Bordenaro of the Office of Catholic Schools at sbordenaro@archchicago.org and to Zachary Wichmann of the Catholic Conference of Illinois (see above email address)
- Be responsible for implementing legislative action alerts in collaboration with the principal at his/her school community
- Keep the principal, pastor, parents and parishioners informed of legislative issues
- Give reports to parent organizations, school boards and parish councils
- Build a relationship between the school and local legislators – write, visit and/or call your legislators and invite them to visit the school. This is important!
- Attend rallies sponsored by the Catholic Conference of Illinois and the Office of Catholic Schools
- Participate in Legislative Workshops sponsored by the Office of Catholic Schools and One Chance Illinois

(See additional LAP information and assistance on page 8)



Political Activity Guidelines

Catholic Schools, as tax-exempt organizations, must follow state and federal guidelines regarding legislative and political actions.

Your school **MAY** and **SHOULD**:

- Host nonpartisan voter registration drives
- Hold unbiased voter education forums with candidates of both parties for elected office
- Distribute approved, unbiased voter education guides
- Conduct advocacy campaigns on behalf of issues consistent with the Church's position and Catholic social teaching
- Invite all legislators to the school

Your school **MAY NOT**:

- Establish or support a political action committee
- Provide its membership with lists of political parties or candidates on any basis
- Distribute campaign literature or biased voter education guidelines on its property
- Use its publications to support, promote or endorse any particular party or candidate
- Make available its facilities to only one party or candidate

** For more detailed information, please contact the Catholic Conference of Illinois to obtain a copy of the brochure "Guidelines on Political Activities for Parishes and Catholic Church Organizations"*



Catholic School Advocacy

Illinois Catholic schools have worked together through the Legislative Action Board and CCI for over 30 years. Many positive initiatives have been enacted as a result of their collaborative efforts. Unfavorable initiatives have been prevented through cooperative lobbying. Below are listed just a few accomplishments and subsequent actions.

Textbook Loan Program

The Illinois Textbook Loan Program was authorized in 1975. The program provided textbooks, textbook substitutes, and since 1996, instructional computer software to public and nonpublic students grades K-12. These monies were lost in the 2009 budget crisis. The Catholic Conference of Illinois continues to make restoring these cuts a top priority.

Parent/Guardian Transportation Reimbursement Program

The Illinois Parent/Guardian State Pupil Transportation Reimbursement Program was authorized in 1986. The program was designed to provide financial assistance to Illinois' parents/guardians of children, grades K-12, to whom free bussing is not provided. These monies were also lost in 2009 and again, restoration is a major priority.

Education Expense Tax Credit

The Illinois Education Expense Tax Credit was authorized in 1999 legislation. It provides the ability for Illinois' residents to take a tax credit on their Illinois Individual Income Tax Return for qualified education expenses paid at any Illinois elementary or secondary school. The tax credit, deducted from one's Illinois' income tax, is 25 percent of qualified education expenses – tuition, book fees and lab fees – over \$250. The tax credit at this time cannot exceed \$500. **An Illinois Department of Revenue Schedule ED** is needed to complete and claim tax credits. Any parent or legal guardian of a K-12 child in Illinois is eligible for this tax. Additional monies for this credit are included in the IKC legislation.

State Recognition of Nonpublic Schools

In 2003 legislation was passed requiring the Illinois State Board of Education to implement a process in which nonpublic schools could obtain state recognition and be the recipients of many educational benefits currently provided to nonpublic school staff and families.

Preschool for All

The Preschool for All program is available for all schools, public and non-public.



Effective Communication within Your Community

Letters to the Editor

Letters to the Editor of local and regional newspapers, readers and weeklies, are one of the most important ways of gaining public visibility and support for specific issues. Elected officials and their appointees pay special attention to the editorial sections of newspapers that reflect the will and values of their local community. Legislators often turn to letters from their constituents to understand how the public views a given topic.

Your local or regional position letter must: (1) set forth your views on a particular subject or, (2) respond to and/or refute a position taken by a legislator on the same subject. This letter stating your position can also be sent to your legislator(s) with only minor adaptations.

Guidelines for Letter Writing

- Prepare an outline to structure your thoughts in a letter with a clear message, supported by facts. The main point of the letter needs to be supported by additional key points.
- Send your letter in response to editorials, articles, legislative action (or inaction) or other letters.
- Be clear and concise. Try to keep letters to one page, using 200 words or less and address only one topic per letter.
- Include important and relevant facts that need to be considered.
- State your assumption, beliefs and conclusions. Recommend a course of action to be taken, based on your reasoning.
- Avoid threats and personal attacks.
- Be timely. Address an issue while it is current and still in the minds of the community.
- Identify yourself. Sign your name, address and telephone number. Newspapers will often call to verify your information.

Letters to Elected Officials

You may follow the same guidelines listed above in sending letters to your elected officials. Ask the legislators for a response that clearly states their position on the issue. If you receive a response that is unclear, write back to the official with additional information or to request clarification of certain of his/her points. Most importantly, write a thank you letter to the legislator who supports your position and a letter of disappointment to those who do not support your position.



Guidelines for Letters to Elected Officials

- Make sure you have the official's correct name, title and office address.
- Be courteous, brief and encouraging.
- State reasons why you want the official to support a particular issue, i.e.
 - "I want a say on how my tax dollars are allocated".
 - "Taxes help fund post-secondary education; it's now time for equity in pre-college education".
 - "As consumers, we all have the right to choose the product(s) for which we pay".
- Thank the official for their attention and consideration of your request.
- Sign the letter and give your address and phone number (Note: Be sure that you are registered to vote.)

Candidates' Forums

Legislative Action Persons (LAPs) can organize and schedule a Candidates' Forum on particular issues in the school's legislative district(s) in collaboration with the principal. This will provide the LAPs and those in their parish or community with the opportunity to hear the views of candidates or legislators with divergent viewpoints on issues of interest to your school.

A Forum should be limited solely to educational issues with legislators and candidates from the school's district. Make these limitations clear to the presenting candidates/legislators and ask that they be prepared to discuss only those issues. Other issues are better dealt with in another type of forum. Make this clear to your audience and ask them to limit their questions to educational issues.

A Forum can have a variety of formats. However, we suggest the following approach for ease of planning and implementation.

Organization

- Begin planning early. Invite all legislators and candidates, whatever their viewpoint. Give them a series of dates to choose from. Inform them of the finalized date, time and structure of the Forum. Once the date is decided, advertise the Forum by placing it in your parish bulletin, your school website, Facebook and/or Twitter, on your local community access television station and in your local newspapers. The advertisements should indicate that your school's goal is to provide an open conversation with legislators and not to sponsor, or endorse, any particular candidate in any race.
- We recommend that you serve some sort of refreshments, which often promotes ongoing communication after the formal program.



Structure: Moderated Three-Section Forum

1. In the **first** section, the candidates/legislators present an opening statement explaining who they are, what office they hold or are running for and their views on educational issues. The order of opening statements should be chosen by lot prior to the Forum.

2. In the **second** section, the candidates/legislators answer questions posed by a moderator. In order to ensure that certain aspects of the pertinent educational issues are addressed, the moderator, prior to the meeting, should prepare a set of questions addressing the issues. These questions should be sent to the candidates/legislators to give them an opportunity to focus their position on the issues.

The candidates/legislators should be given three minutes to answer the question or issue posed to him/her. Three minutes is an adequate amount of time to answer a question or address an issue. Once a candidate answers the question, invite the opponent to respond to the answer, but also with a three-minute time limit. Choose a moderator who will enforce the time limits and who will think on his/her feet to raise other questions for the candidates that might be prompted by the initial questions. The moderator must see that each speaker receives equal time.

[Short Break]

3. In the **third** and final section, the candidates/legislators answer questions from the audience. These questions can be given verbally, or can be written on note cards. Ask that each question be directed to a particular presenter. Give the candidate/legislator three minutes to respond, and then give his/her opponent three minutes to offer any comments or rebuttal.

At the end of the scheduled time, bring the Forum to a closure. Invite the speakers to stay and talk with the audience, thanking the candidates/legislators and the audience for their attendance and participation.

Follow up with a thank you note to the speakers.



LAP (Legislative Action Person)

This is a person who connects to school parents/guardians and to the parish community and promotes legislative action. A single LAP will need some help – ask another interested parent or guardian to join you in getting the information to other parents and the community and to promote enthusiasm. Work closely with your principal. Partnership is what helps progress for success.

Additional Suggestions for Action

Make direct contact and build relationships with your legislators!

- Invite legislators to your school functions - award ceremonies, competitions, Spirit Week activities, plays, etc.
- Have legislators judge science fairs and other competitions
- Visit your legislators' local offices
- Plan a trip to visit them in their Springfield offices
- Get in touch with local non-public schools (Hebrew, Lutheran, Christian Academy's etc.) to form a coalition that is broader than the Catholic community and therefore more effective because of diversified peoples speaking about the issues with their local legislators
- Hold a Saturday breakfast coffee. Present facts and figures of what you hope to accomplish, your needs and dreams for your children's school and for their future
- Involve your high school social studies classes in voter registration
- Initiate a letter writing campaign – use guidelines in this Manual and insert your specific issue

If help is needed in identifying which legislators support which issues or the proper language to use with legislators, please contact:

Zachary Wichmann at the Catholic Conference of Illinois – wichmann@ilcatholic.org

Or

Ebony Scott of One Chance Illinois – ebony@oncechanceillinois.org

