



I-CANUpdate

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INDIANA CATHOLIC CONFERENCE CELEBRATES 50 YEARS (1967-2017)

Most of the bills are now accessible; by early next week all will be released. Committees are meeting and bills are moving to the floor.

Senate Education Committee, chaired by Senator Dennis Kruse (R – Auburn), has conducted three meetings thus far and moved several bills that affect Catholic schools. **SB 30, Choice scholarship information**, authored by Senator Eric Koch (R - Bedford) **passed out of committee on Wednesday after being amended**. Initially, it only applied to choice scholarships (voucher) but school choice is much broader and includes charter schools and public school choice. Hence, the **amendment provided that information regarding all choices added by parents within a school district will be distributed**. The bill requires the Department of Education (DOE) to provide the number of students and the various schools that students attend within a school district. This information is already collected by and available at DOE; if bill passes it would be sent to public school districts. **ICC supports the amendment and is neutral regarding the bill. It now goes to the Senate floor for consideration.**

Also being considered by Senate Education is **SB 34, Background checks for school employees**, authored by Senator James Merritt (R – Indianapolis). This bill, and a similar one considered by House Education Committee on Tuesday, **HB 1079, Teacher licenses**, authored by Representative Jeff Thompson (R – Lizton), **are the result of a summer study committee**. The bills **would require expanded criminal history background checks on all school employees**. Currently, only recently hired teachers have been subject to criminal background checks. This would require all employees to have the check within the next five years and to be checked every five years thereafter. Catholic schools already do the background checks on all employees. The focus of the bill is public schools but would also apply to all accredited schools, including Catholic schools. **Another aspect of HB 1079 and the subject of SB 298, Pre-employment background checks for school employees**, authored by Senator Ron Alting (R – Lafayette), **would change current law to require completion of criminal background checks prior to being employed**. Current law requires employees to work up to 3 months before the background check must be completed. **SB 298 will be heard in Senate Education this Wednesday.**

Another bill, **SB 86, School curriculum**, passed Senate Education on Wednesday. **It applies to Catholic schools but will not change policy**. It is authored by Senator Jean Leising. (R – Oldenburg). **SB 86 would require cursive writing to be taught in all accredited schools**. While this was a standard feature in all schools, some have discontinued it. Catholic schools, however, have continued the practice. **This bill has passed the Senate each of the past several years only not to get a hearing the House. This bill now moves to the floor for full Senate consideration.**

Next week, the Senate Family and Children Services Committee, chaired by Senator Ron Grooms (R - Jeffersonville), will **hear SB 9, SNAP and drug convictions, and SB 154, Removal of asset limits for SNAP eligibility**; both are authored by Senator James Merritt. **Both bills are supported by ICC.** SB 9 would address a problem many former prisoners face after being released. **Because jobs are not available for many released prisoners, assistance is needed to help transition back into society and the family.** SB 154 also addresses a similar concern for many families caught in layoff and transitions as a result of changes in employment. **SB 9 passed the Senate last year but did not receive a hearing in House Ways and Means.** We hope this year has a different outcome.

Preschool education is major topic this year for many legislators. **The current pilot program** initiated in 2015, **benefiting low income families in 5 counties, is targeted for expansion. HB 1004, Prekindergarten education**, authored by Representative Bob Behning (R – Indianapolis), **will be heard in the coming weeks. ICC supports the bill as it provides for parental choice and includes religious preschools and other private options**, allowing parents to direct the education and formation of their children. HB 1004 also provides that these children who receive pre-K scholarship to be eligible for the school choice scholarship beginning in kindergarten. **Currently, school choice scholarships are not generally available to kindergarten students.** Logically, a child/family that begins education in a school setting should be permitted to continue it at the same location and not disrupt the curriculum and progress. Families in need of support for preschool are likely to need support for kindergarten. The Senate has its own version to expand the pre-K program. **SB 276, Early Education grant pilot program, will be heard on Wednesday in Senate Education.** This bill expands the pilot to 5 additional counties and provides for a longitudinal study of its impact. **ICC supports both bills.**

In addition to the Update, you can obtain more detailed information regarding the bills, as well as detailed information about the legislative process and the Indiana General Assembly by clicking [here](#). You can also access the archived I-CAN Updates, ICC positions and other background information at the ICC website www.indianacc.org