



EDUCATION REFORM & CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

INTRODUCTION

As partners in education, private and public school leaders must work together to ensure that resources which enhance educational services are made available to all students and staff. The Wisconsin Catholic Conference (WCC) supports federal education reforms that ensure the equitable participation of Catholic school students, teachers, and administrators in the provision of federal education services.

CHURCH TEACHING

Catholic teaching has long recognized that education is the surest path to full participation in the social, economic, and political life of our nation. Wisconsin must therefore sustain its public commitment by ensuring that students receive a quality education and are able to access necessary educational services in both public and private schools.

As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* expressly states:

As those first responsible for the education of their children, parents have the right to *choose a school for them* which corresponds to their own convictions. This right is fundamental. As far as possible parents have the duty of choosing schools that will best help them in their task as Christian educators. Public authorities have the duty of guaranteeing this parental right and of ensuring the concrete conditions for its exercise. (#2229, italics in original)

In a pluralistic society, the state recognizes the work of both public and private actors. In the same way that Catholic hospitals, charitable agencies, and universities, along with their public counterparts, receive public funds to assist the poor and vulnerable, so too do parental choice and equitable access to educational services recognize the vital ministry that Catholic schools provide in our communities.

ESSA REFORMS

In 2016, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) amended the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), replacing the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act passed in 2002. The ESEA includes several different sections or Titles:

- **Title I:** provides supplemental educational services for low-income and at-risk students.
- **Title II:** focuses on preparing, training, and recruiting high quality teachers, principals, and other school leaders. It also aids in the creation of a Professional Development Plan.
- **Title III:** creates and provides language instruction for English learners and immigrant students. It also provides professional development for teachers and educational personnel and translation services for parents.
- **Title IV:** creates 21st Century Schools through two major grant programs designed to help ensure a well-rounded education; improve the use of technology and student digital literacy; and help students in low-performing schools meet challenging academic standards.

According to the National Catholic Educational Association, more than 118,000 students in 3,546 Catholic schools receive Title I services.

The ESSA levels the playing field by ensuring the “equitable participation” of all schools serving students in need of assistance. Under the new law, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) is charged with developing a state plan that provides a comprehensive design of how the state will address academic assessment, accountability, school support and improvement, and support for students and educators. By law, the DPI must seek input from stakeholders during the plan’s development. The Governor, members of the Legislature, public school districts, tribal representatives, teachers and school leaders, and a host of organizations representing individuals, such as parents and families, students with unique needs, underserved populations, employers, and private school students, must all be consulted in the plan’s design. Once implemented, private and public school leaders must meet enhanced consultation requirements when deciding how to best assist underserved students and those with unique needs. Both the DPI and the Legislature have an obligation to the people of Wisconsin to make certain that the process of developing the state plan is inclusive and responsive to stakeholders.

OMBUDSMAN

The ESSA also mandates the creation of an ombudsman, appointed by the DPI, to ensure that local public districts are following the law’s provisions regarding private school participation. The ombudsman, who must be in place by July 1, 2017, will verify that Catholic schools with students who are eligible for Title services are engaged in a discussion with public school partners on how to best serve those students.

WCC POSITION

The WCC supports the ESSA and urges the DPI to seek meaningful consultation with a broad swath of stakeholders as required under the new law. The Wisconsin Legislature should ensure that Wisconsin is complying with new provisions which require greater private school and student consultation with public school partners. Finally, the ombudsman position should continue to be designed with input from private school representatives and in a manner that truly helps private school students access services. The Legislature should support these efforts by providing the fiscal resources necessary for the position to be fully effective.

ACTION REQUESTED

Please contact your legislators and urge them to:

1. Make certain legislators and the DPI coordinate ESSA implementation with private school stakeholder input, as well as other stakeholders.
2. Make certain legislators and the DPI implement the ombudsman position with input from private school stakeholders and designate the resources necessary to make the position effective.

For more information, please contact Larry Haas at 608/257-0004.

To contact your State Senator or Representative, visit the Wisconsin State Legislature website at <http://legis.wisconsin.gov> and click on “Find My Legislators,” or call the State Legislative Hotline, 1-800-362-9472.