

September 29, 2009

State Superintendent Chris Koch
Illinois State Board of Education
100 North 1st Street
Springfield, IL 62777

Dear Superintendent Koch:

I write today on behalf of the St. James, Highwood, school community to express our deep concern regarding the significant cuts to the Illinois State Board of Education's (ISBE) Fiscal Year 2010 budget. In this budget, forced by the legislature's inability to fund specific line items, ISBE reduced the funding of the Transportation Reimbursement Program and the Textbook Loan Program to zero, while cutting 75% of the ADA Block Grant and 33% of the Early Childhood Block Grant.

These programs are not only vitally important to Illinois' students and families; they represent the only programs benefiting the entire educational system by offering assistance to both public and nonpublic schools. Nonpublic school parents are taxpayers, sending their full share to the state for public education funding while paying out-of-pocket for the education of their children. That these programs benefiting our schools and families faced a disproportionate burden of necessary budget cuts is both tragic and unfair.

ISBE's decision to completely de-fund the Illinois Textbook Loan program is particularly upsetting. The efficiency of this program's operations, and the unquestionable good it serves by helping to ensure that both public and nonpublic school students are learning from the most up-to-date educational materials should have ensured its continuation at some level. ISBE's decision to reduce this program's funding to zero is not only damaging; it should be unacceptable.

The General Assembly has recently recognized the importance of the Textbook Loan Program by doubling its funding in Fiscal Year 2007. There must be some room to continue this vital program at a reduced level until the state's fiscal condition improves. Certainly, any objective analysis of this program in regards to others funded by ISBE will concede the point.

We urge you to take any action possible to relieve the pressure of these budget cuts in the current fiscal year, and to honestly re-evaluate the importance of all four of these programs in next year's budget. Our schools and families, in conjunction with the Catholic Conference of Illinois (CCI) and the Illinois Coalition of Nonpublic Schools (ICNS) will strongly advocate for the restoration of these funds, now and in the future.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,