

## WSSC 2009 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

### CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

#### PRINCIPLES

*Parents—the first and most important educators—have a fundamental right to choose the education best suited to the needs of their children, including public, private, and religious schools. Government, through such means as tax credits and publicly funded scholarships, should help provide resources for parents, especially those of modest means, to exercise this basic right without discrimination. Students in all educational settings should have opportunities for moral and character formation.*

Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship, USCCB, 2007

**SAFE ENVIRONMENT:** State law requires adults in the education system to report suspected abuse. However, there are no mandatory state requirements to provide instruction on the prevention of child abuse. There are effective programs that actually prevent and reduce child abuse. These can be integrated into existing curricula. WSSC is working to ensure a bill is introduced to require effective, age-appropriate education programs on the prevention of child abuse for all public school students.

**BACKGROUND CHECKS:** Private schools currently do not have access to full background checks reports under state statute and pay more for State Patrol and FBI administrative processing. Recent changes in the background check procedure at the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction make it possible to allow private school administrators to receive and/or access the full reports and to make the costs equitable with the public schools. Statutory amendments will be necessary to enact these changes.

**EARLY LEARNING AND CARE:** Catholic schools and charities in Washington provide an array of early learning and care programs, including pre-K care, pre-school, and before and after school programs. The Department of Early Learning continues its work to support access to safe, healthy and quality programs for children and serves as the licensing agent for early learning and care programs. Legislators will be reviewing proposals on quality ratings and improvement system, pre-school standards, and support for low-income families.

**HEALTH AND SAFETY RULES:** The State Board of Health has developed a set of new and thorough health and safety rules for public and private schools. These rules include improvements to air quality, water quality, exposure to pesticides, etc. The costs associated with the improvements have been estimated to be in the hundreds of millions for public schools.

**CHARITABLE CONTRIBUTIONS:** Washington non-profit organizations feel the effect of reduced charitable giving during economic downturns. Private non-profit schools and families are harmed by having to meet expenses through increased tuition rates. Legislation has been introduced in previous sessions that would provide a tax break for contributions to schools.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

##### WSSC SUPPORTS:

- Mandating child abuse prevention education programs for all students in the K-12 public school system
- Changing the background check process to provide access to law enforcement reports
- Improving the state's eligibility and reimbursement system for state-subsidized child care
- Monitoring policy proposals relating to early learning programs (child care: pre-school, before and after-school)
- Monitoring legislation and rule-making relating to health and safety rules for all K-12 schools
- Providing incentives for charitable contributions to schools