



ACTIVISM IN ACTION: HOW TO BE AN LB 50 ACTIVIST

Are you an activist in support of LB 50 (the tax-credit scholarship bill that is carrying over to the 2012 legislative session)? In order to bring about the major game-changing education reform contained in this bill, activism must be widespread. What can you do to help? You can visit, call, write, or e-mail your state senator and ask for his/her support of this bill. Without a flood of constant reminders from constituents, state senators will not be interested in LB 50. With next session being the short, 60-day session, there is limited time to get the bill to the floor to give it a chance of passage. Advancement of LB 50 to the floor in January is essential to passing this bill in 2012.

On the final day of the 2011 legislative session, the Clerk of the Legislature announced that Senator Ken Haar of Malcolm had signed on as a co-sponsor of LB 50 with Senator Bob Krist, the chief introducer, and Senator Tony Fulton of Lincoln. How was Senator Haar persuaded to support LB 50?

Efforts by North American Martyrs School (Lincoln) parents and administrators influenced him. Rev. Brian Connor, Pastor and Superintendent, Sr. Patricia Heirigs, Principal, and a spokesman for the parents met

with Senator Haar to discuss LB 50. The meeting went quite well. Parents at Martyrs School were also asked by administrators to contact Senator Haar to seek his support for LB 50. Parents responded to that request. Senator Haar's response was positive.

Similar activism by parents, teachers, Catholic school alumni, parishioners, and all citizen-taxpayers in support of LB 50 with members of the Revenue Committee is crucial in encouraging them to advance this bill to the full Legislature. Those members include: Senators Abbie Cornett of Bellevue (Chairperson), Dennis Utter of Hastings, Galen Hadley of Kearney, Greg Adams of York, Deb Fischer of Valentine, LeRoy Loudon of Ellsworth, Pete Pirsch of Omaha and Paul Schumacher of Columbus.

In order to advance this bill, many activists must contact each member of the Revenue Committee. What should you say? Please see suggested messages in the text-box on page two for use with your state senator and/or members of the

Revenue Committee. Take two or three small steps you haven't taken before to support LB 50 and encourage your friends, family, and neighbors to do the same.

Did you know that in April NFCSP turned in 3,385 signatures (3,400 have now signed) in favor of LB 50 to the Revenue Committee members with an online petition? How did NFCSP obtain so many signatures? Six hundred sixty-eight of you shared or recommended the LB 50 petition link on Facebook, six people tweeted it on Twitter, and one shared it on Google+. Thanks to all who signed the petition and used social media to rapidly spread the word.

NFCSP needs all hands on deck to help pass this important bill. Be an LB 50 activist! Make the change happen! Thank you!

See page two to see how YOU can become involved!

Catholic Schools Week
January 29 - February 5, 2012
This year's theme:
Catholic Schools - Faith. Academics. Service.

LB 50 Constituent Messages

1. **Pell Grants help students attend and pay for colleges they choose** (including private colleges and universities). A similar state-based means should be available to help families with younger children attend K-12 schools. Please help families afford the schools of their dreams and vote to advance LB 50! Thanks!
2. **Many families are financially stressed.** Please vote to advance LB 50 to help families bridge the difficult, increasing gap between tuition and how much they can afford to pay with their reduced net income. Thank you!
3. **LB 50 would create new pathways of educational opportunity** for families who wish to enroll their children in private schools, but are unable to do so due to limited means. Educating more students in private schools would save taxpayers significant sums of money. Please vote to advance LB 50. Thank you.
4. **Recent Department of Revenue reports indicate** that state revenue receipts have increased since the Legislature adjourned in 2011. Given this improved fiscal status, please advance LB 50 to allow the state to invest in a tax-credit scholarship program, helping families in need to educate their children in the schools of their choice. Thank you.
5. **Our country and our great state are built on individuals** having the opportunity to make decisions that are in the best interests of families and local communities. LB 50 supports that freedom for families to make decisions about their K-12 child's education among multiple options. Please vote to advance LB 50 from committee. Thank you for your time and service.
6. **Private schools serve the common good.** Students attending private schools work hard and succeed, as demonstrated by graduation rates. Please help keep private-school education a viable option for hard-working families by voting to advance LB 50 to the floor. Thank you!

CONTACT THESE SENATORS!

The senators of the Unicameral Revenue Committee are the key players in deciding whether LB 50 advances from committee to the floor for debate.

Please contact them, using one of these messages (or another of your own) supporting tax credits for greater school choice opportunities in Nebraska!

Abbie Cornett (45): acornett@leg.ne.gov
Greg Adams (24): gadams@leg.ne.gov
Pete Pirsch (4): ppirsch@leg.ne.gov
Galen Hadley (37): ghadley@leg.ne.gov
LeRoy Louden (49): llouden@leg.ne.gov
Deb Fischer (43): dfischer@leg.ne.gov
Paul Schumacher (22): pschumacher@leg.ne.gov

PRIVATE SCHOOL SCORES EXCEED SAT BENCHMARK

College-bound seniors in religious and independent schools were significantly higher than the national average for all three subjects tested (critical reading, math, and writing). Average national SAT scores were 497 in reading, 514 for math, and 489 in writing. Students in religious schools averaged 531, 533, and 528.

Private-school scores also exceeded the SAT "College and Career Readiness Benchmark", a

combined score of 1550 in the three subjects. For all college-bound seniors, the combined average SAT score was 1500, 50 points shy of the benchmark. Religious school students averaged 1592.

The College Board reported that 43% of all seniors either met or exceeded the benchmark, which indicates a high degree of preparedness for college and a high probability of success in

college and likelihood to complete college. Research and analysis of students' SAT scores, including students who attended more than 100 colleges and universities was used to create the index. The benchmark score is designed to indicate a 65% probability of achieving a B- average or higher in the first year of college, which in turn frequently indicates more likely than not college success and completion.

NEW JOBS BILL HAS PRIVATE SCHOOL RENOVATION COMPONENT

Last month, the President announced a new \$447 billion jobs bill known as the *American Jobs Act* (“AJA”) to help boost economic growth and employ more workers, including a component to renovate and repair schools, both public and private. Private schools with 40% or higher poverty rates would be eligible to participate in the renovation grants. Twenty Catholic schools in Nebraska have poverty rates of 40% or higher using NDE data for 2011-12 school year.

The school modernization component would provide for \$25 billion for K-12 projects and could help up to 35,000 schools while employing thousands of people to repair and upgrade schools. \$10 billion would be earmarked for the 100 school districts with the highest percentage of low-income families; the other \$15 billion would go to states, which would then distribute funds to school districts half by formula and half by competitive grants for the most needed projects with special priority for rural districts.

While public schools would be allowed to use the modernization funds for science labs, more energy-efficient boilers, and internet access in the classroom, private schools would have a narrower menu of upgrades according to the bill’s language. Private schools

could renovate to meet standards set for public schools by the *Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990* or section 504 of the *Rehabilitation Act of 1973*. One other allowable option would be for removing or abatement of asbestos or polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) in schools.

House Speaker John Boehner (R-OH) suggested that some of the ideas in the bill presented “opportunities for common ground”. However, passage of the bill is uncertain as it faces some opposition. Rep. John Kline (R-MN), Chair of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce, responded that “more stimulus spending is not the right solution to the nation’s job crisis. Common sense tells us that putting the federal government in the business of school construction will only lead to higher costs and more regulations.” Perhaps bipartisan support can be found for at least some of

the bill’s provisions but even some Democrats expressed concern about some pieces of the bill.

For information on the AJA, visit www.whitehouse.gov or www.capenet.org.



Give thanks for:

- Our families
- Our faith
- Our freedom

Prayer for Catholic Schools....

Saint Thomas Aquinas, you are called by Holy Mother Church, the Angel of the Schools. Your wisdom, gathered through long meditation from the source of all wisdom, the most holy Trinity, has long been a shining light in the Catholic Church. Ignorance of the things of God is a darkness now enveloping the minds of many of our countrymen. In this darkness, we need an angel like you who will protect, foster, and nourish the schools we have, and guide and strengthen us in establishing and building newer and more adequate schools for the instruction of our children in the ways of Christ.

Help and bless the generous sisters, brothers, and priests who labor so unselfishly in the classroom to spread the knowledge of Christ. Inspire our Catholic men and women to be most generous in the support of the schools we have. Grant to parents the wise generosity they need to give their child back to God when that child wishes to follow a priestly or religious vocation. Help us, Saint Thomas, Angel of the Schools, to understand what you taught, and to follow your example. Amen.

ESEA BILL WOULD EXCLUDE PRIVATE SCHOOLS FROM BLUE RIBBON

The Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee last month approved a revision of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* that includes a provision to revamp the Blue Ribbon Schools Program and to exclude private schools from receiving the award. Since the 1980’s, the program has honored both public and private schools. The bill now advances to the full Senate.

Section 1117 of the Senate

reauthorization bill would invite states to designate the top five percent of public schools as being eligible for the Blue Ribbon designation based on several measures, including the percentage of students who are considered “college and career ready” in language arts and mathematics. Blue Ribbon schools would have more autonomy over their budget and additional flexibility in using federal funds.

The Council for American

Private Education has contacted HELP Committee members on this issue and other provisions of ESEA, urging that language be included to preserve the principle that funds generated by the count of students in a district who attend private schools be reserved for the benefit of those students (in programs that provide such benefits such as Title I-A and Title II-A) before a state or district elects to “flex” funds or direct them elsewhere.

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EDUCATORS HONORED

On Sept. 15, 2011, nine educators in the Archdiocese of Omaha were honored at the annual Archbishop's Dinner for Education. The honorees include: Troy Berryman, principal, Sacred Heart School, Norfolk, Dave Garland, principal, St. Gerald's, Omaha, Fr. Tom Merkel, president of Creighton Prep in Omaha, Lori Christensen, Hartington Cedar Catholic, Tim Mueeting, Roncalli High School, Mary Hassenstab, St. Anthony, Cindy Heimes, Mary Our Queen, Omaha, Maureen Harrington, St. Philip Neri, and Mike Mansour, president of Jesuit Academy, Omaha. Congratulations and keep up the good work!

Teachers' commitment to the school and dedication to their vocation is demonstrated in a variety of ways, one being the number of absences during the course of a year. In a recent survey, administrators were asked to what degree teacher absenteeism was a problem in their school. In private schools, 1.1 percent of administrators said it was a serious problem, compared to 11.5 percent of administrators in public schools. Similarly, 1.5 percent of private school administrators and 9.1 percent of public school administrators identified student absenteeism as a serious problem. Student tardiness was labeled a serious problem by 0.6 percent of administrators in private schools and 8.1 percent of administrators in public schools.

More information about the reports and study is available at <http://nces.ed.gov/survey/hsls09/>.

LAMBERT REPLACES PANKONIN IN THE UNICAMERAL

On Oct. 7, Governor Dave Heineman named R. Paul Lambert of Plattsmouth to replace Dave Pankonin of Louisville who resigned from his District 2 position in the State Legislature. Senator Lambert has served as mayor of Plattsmouth for 8 years. He said that his priorities will closely reflect those of his constituents: taxes, funding, creating jobs, and the economy.

Senator Lambert's appointment will run through 2012. He intends to run for an ensuing two-year term in November 2012.

District 2 covers parts of Sarpy, Cass, and Otoe counties.