

## WSCC 2015 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, 2011

**SAFE ENVIRONMENT:** State law requires adults in the education system to report suspected abuse. However, there are no effective mandatory state requirements for teachers to provide instruction to students on the prevention of child abuse. Effective prevention programs could be integrated into existing curricula. WSCC is working to gain passage of legislation to require effective, age-appropriate education programs on prevention of child abuse for all public and private school students.

**EARLY LEARNING AND CARE:** Catholic schools and Catholic Charities provide an array of early learning and care programs, including birth-to-five programs, pre-school, and before and after school programs. Legislation will be introduced to establish a free comprehensive preschool program for eligible children and their families to help children enter kindergarten ready to succeed. WSCC will monitor the recommendations to ensure that choice for all families to access early learning opportunities is promoted, and that any standards or requirements do not impede Catholic schools or Catholic Charities from serving low-income families.

**HEALTHY LEARNING ENVIRONMENT:** Children who are homeless experience significant impediments to learning. Recent data from public schools has indicated that there are more than 30,000 homeless students statewide. The Department of Commerce administered an emergency rapid housing program with limited funding in the last biennium. Childhood hunger is also a serious obstacle to learning, and in a recent survey three out of five teachers said that they have children who regularly come to school hungry. Additional funding will be needed to enable children to have a healthy learning environment.

**TEACHER CERTIFICATION:** With limited exceptions, Washington State law requires private school teachers to have state certification. The Professional Educator Standards Board (PESB) is responsible for the rules and process of certification. The Board has no private school representation. WSCC will work with private school advocates to add a private school representative to the PESB.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

##### WSCC SUPPORTS:

- Mandating and funding child abuse prevention education programs for all students in K-12 schools
- Monitoring policy proposals relating to all early learning programs
- Securing housing for homeless students and their families
- Improving access to meals in school settings
- Adding a private school representative to the Professional Educator Standards Board