



Statement on Fiscal Year 2016 State Budget
Senate Budget and Appropriations Hearing
March 25, 2015

Good morning Mr. Chairman and Members of the Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee. My name is Dr. George Corwell, Director of the Office of Education for the New Jersey Catholic Conference, and I have with me Mary McElroy, Esq., Director of the New Jersey Network of Catholic School Families for the Archdiocese of Newark.

We are speaking this morning about two specific nonpublic school accounts in Governor Christie's FY '16 Budget: namely, nonpublic school nursing services and nonpublic school technology aid. We also wish to express our gratitude for the modest \$2M Opportunity Scholarship Demonstration Program pilot.

With respect to nursing services, we were most appreciative of the Legislature's increase in nursing services raising the support limit to \$94.00 per pupil. However, Governor Christie's Budget increased the amount by \$750,000 from his recommendation in FY '15, but eliminated all of what was described as "Legislative add-on," thus, reducing the amount of the support limit to \$85.00 per pupil.

We need additional money for nursing services for the following reasons which are compelling ones for the health and safety of nonpublic school students:

1. The school nurse has played a major role as a first responder in a number of key emergencies that have taken place in all schools, and dramatically so in nonpublic schools.
2. At the current figure of \$85.00 the per-pupil amount (even if it were funded at that level) has increased by a total of only \$25.00 from the original figure of \$60.00 in the 1991-1992 school year. Even though over the last 23 years the dollars have increased, the actual increase is only \$1.04 per pupil per year, hardly enough to keep pace with the costs are that imposed on us by service providers.
3. The nonpublic school community is totally "dependent upon the kindness of strangers" when it comes to the cost of nursing services. School districts have the option of either providing the nurse themselves or contracting with a third party contractor in order to provide these services. As an example of the varying costs for such services, one third party contractor in the past year agreed, in principle, to a \$34.00 an hour rate for a nurse with the result being an increase to \$43.00 per hour when the services began.
4. The New Jersey Department of Education currently does no programmatic monitoring of nonpublic school nursing services. Thus, the services do not start at the same time as nursing services in public schools. As a result, there is a pattern of adding hours at the end of the school year – not the ideal way to deliver these services.

5. Parents of nonpublic school students choose the school their child attends for a variety of reasons. Like all parents, they expect that the school nurse will be there for their child's health needs that arise during the school day. As medical advances continue and children with significant medical conditions are able to attend school with their peers, it is critical that a nurse be present for these students.
6. Recently, several legislative initiatives have resulted in additional duties for nonpublic school nurses. Those include requirements under the Scholastic Student-Athlete Safety Act (P.L. 2013, c. 71), the Cardiac Arrest legislation (P.L. 2013, c. 209), and P.L. 2015 c.13, currently in the Assembly, which would mandate that nonpublic schools maintain an additional supply of epinephrine for treating students without protocols. Replenishing that supply will use valuable dollars for supplies under our nursing services legislation.

Turning to the Nonpublic School Technology Initiative, this is a program that had provided funding at \$40.00 per student. For a number of budget cycles, it had been completely removed from the budget. Why is this program important? It provides modest funding for nonpublic school students to use technology in school. As a society, we are keenly aware of how technology has evolved and the doors it opens to students for quality learning and enrichment. In all schools, technology is used across the curriculum. Every day, students use technology in large and small ways to make learning immediate, memorable, and to connect themselves to the wider world around them.

We are grateful that the Legislature restored Nonpublic School Technology Initiative to \$32.00 per pupil in last year's Appropriations Act. However, Governor Christie's FY '16 Budget eliminated that increase and reduced the amount to \$20.00 per pupil. The public school Security Aid Account, currently funded at \$195M, is a fungible public school account that can be used to fund technology initiatives for public school students.

We expect our children, whether in public or nonpublic schools, to be prepared to contribute and thrive in a global society, to be citizens of the world. It is unfortunate and a disservice to nonpublic school students to minimize their need for technology in the classroom by seriously underfunding Technology Aid. Children enrolled in nonpublic schools are no less deserving of the necessity of technology in their classrooms. We respectfully request that the Nonpublic School Technology Initiative be restored to \$40.00 per student.

We appreciate all of the efforts that you are making and will continue to make to provide the citizens of New Jersey with the best possible services within available dollars in the State Budget for 2015, and we hope that you will recognize our need to assist our students with these valuable health and safety provisions and technology.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of our requests.

Submitted by: George V. Corwell, Ed.D.
Director, Office of Education, New Jersey Catholic Conference