

## Diocese of Austin

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Office of the Bishop

*via email to [trustees@austinisd.org](mailto:trustees@austinisd.org)*

October 25, 2019

Board of Trustees  
Austin Independent School District  
1111 W. Sixth Street  
Building A, Suite 250  
Austin, Texas 78703

Dear Honorable Trustees:

Although I cannot be present at your public hearing on Monday, October 28, 2019, I am sending this letter to be entered as testimony against the proposed curriculum on human sexuality that you are considering adopting.

As a resident of the city of Austin, I urge the school board not to accept the proposed curriculum on human sexuality. Though I am the leader of the Catholic Church in central Texas, the concerns I want to express today are not of a religious nature. I am not asking the public school district to propose tenets of faith to their students. Rather, my request concerns the common good, which the proposed curriculum threatens. In addition, I am concerned about the possible violation of the Texas legal requirements of 8-2F-28.004(c.3) regarding age appropriate curriculum and 8-2F-28.004(e.1-4) reference to abstinence.

I appreciate much of the motivation reflected in the curriculum as well as some of the proposed objectives. I also desire our schools to be places of respect, where students can learn, grow, and develop into mature adults. However, among the various elements of the proposed curriculum, there are some objectives based on unproven and controversial theories which, if implemented, would expose our students to unwarranted risk of harm. It is reasonable and prudent to choose curricula in the area of human sexuality according to the same criteria used to choose curricula in various other subjects. No school district would present unfounded hypotheses in the area of physics as certain truths to be acted upon. The scientifically uncertain nature of the theories undergirding the human sexuality curriculum ought to be enough to reject it.

For example, in the lesson summary entitled, "Identity," the proposed curriculum reflects the promotion of a gender theory - namely, that gender identity is unrelated to one's bodily sex - which remains an unproven hypothesis. To promote such a theory is irresponsible and not without real consequences. The growing acceptance of this theory has dramatically increased the desire for experimental interventions to address gender dysphoria despite the lack of convincing evidence that such interventions are beneficial. In reality, the overall failure of hormonal and surgical interventions to address gender dysphoria effectively, and the harmful side effects of such interventions (including increased risk of suicide), present strong reasons to view such a theory with suspicion. To make it the basis for the systematic instruction proposed in the human sexuality curriculum would be irresponsible.

In regard to legal requirements addressing abstinence, this curriculum appears to be limited in the requirements of abstinence as the expected standard and briefly mentions abstinence as the only sure way to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease, including AIDS. In the 8th grade curriculum, a chart is provided on the various forms of contraceptives outlining those contraceptives that are “easy to get,” “easy to hide,” “easy to buy,” and “party-ready.” This lesson is not providing information about the value of abstinence but encouraging sexual relationships.  
<https://www.bedsider.org/methods/matrix>

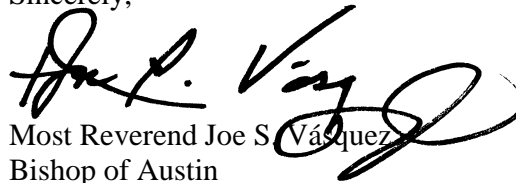
The curriculum introduces topics such as gender identity, gender assignment, gender reassignment medical procedures, and premature sexual activity all before a child is developmentally ready to make decisions on these matters. The 6th grade curriculum discusses the appropriateness of transgender identity, which is portrayed in a cartoon video. The content is not age appropriate according to the legal requirement of 8-2F-28.004(c.3) 8-2F for 6th grade (which is 11 years of age). In addition, the curriculum sends mixed messages when it discusses appropriate sexual intercourse with minors and at the same time discusses sexual abuse of a minor.

Additionally, in the 8th grade curriculum, the American Sexual Health Association’s website, IWannaKnow.org “Sexual Health,” is cited as a reference; however, the website itself references this resource for those 18 to 80 years of age.

The adoption of this curriculum undermines parental rights by encouraging children from the age of 14 to obtain medical care such as birth control, STI tests, and abortions. This curriculum appears to instruct children on how to access prescription drugs (such as birth control), sexually transmitted infection services, as well as other reproductive medical care services including abortion procedures. It even instructs them how to obtain these services without parental consent, authorization, or even notification when students are directed to a resource website that states they can receive these services “without your parents finding out. It’s confidential and you don’t need their permission.”  
[\(http://sexted.org/\)](http://sexted.org/)

The parents of our city rely upon the school district to assist them in the education of their children. Although the proposed curriculum includes the possibility of parents being able to opt out, sorting through the controversial scientific issues surrounding the theories which undergird the curriculum may prove difficult for many families, so that it will not be easy for them to make an informed decision. Providing the possibility for parents to opt out is not an excuse to go forward with a highly controversial and potentially harmful lesson plan when the health and well-being of our students is at stake. It would be irresponsible and our city deserves better.

Sincerely,

  
Most Reverend Joe S. Vázquez  
Bishop of Austin

JSV:mj

cc: Dr. Paul Cruz, Superintendent  
*via superintendent@austinisd.org*