

## MEMORANDUM

(CONFIDENTIAL)

**TO:** (Arch)diocesan Directors of Catechetical, Catholic Schools, Respect/Family Life, Social Action, and Youth & Young Adults

**FROM:** Raymond Burnell, Director of Education

**DATE:** Tuesday, July 30 2019

**RE:** *SEXUAL HEALTH EDUCATION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS*

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Implementation of comprehensive sexual health education in public schools, per the “California Healthy Youth Act”, is of concern to a growing number of Catholic families within our parishes. For those parents or guardians, some state-recommended curricula that *may be taught* (if school districts decide to adopt) includes graphic instruction and morally objectionable ideas and behavior.

Recognizing this affect, our California bishops have asked the California Catholic Conference (CCC) to clarify the issue and respond as appropriate. Toward that end, the CCC is undertaking a four-fold strategic approach to address the issues of sexual health education in public schools. This includes:

✚ **Providing (Arch)dioceses with guidance on the realities of current law.** Attached to this Memo, are advanced copies of two documents that will be publicly released this Friday, August 2<sup>nd</sup>. Combined these materials highlight the extent parents/guardians can legally oversee the sexual health education of their children. The first doc is a revised article for the CCC’s Insights newsletter/Website to replace a similar one from last August. This is an important Back-to-School “reissue”. The second document presents a deeper dive on parental rights/responsibilities linked to the article. This flyer format is ideal as an insert for parish bulletins and as a handout for individual ministries.

CCC staff is also available to consult with (Arch)diocesan leadership. Please note that the CCC has limited time and resources to permit travel to our 12 (Arch)dioceses for multiple pastor/parent presentations. Thus, the best approach is to empower Catholic leaders with an understanding of the law and ways to consider that addresses this issue locally. This would involve a preferred Zoom conference call or in-person meeting with: Directors of Catechetical, Catholic Schools, Respect/Family Life, Social Action, and Youth & Young Adults – all together at once, since coordination among multiple diocesan ministries is necessitated. Then, as determined, (Arch)diocesan leaders could provide on their own informational sessions with pastors/parents, individual ministries, and/or create an website if desired.

July 30, 2019

California Catholic Conference – Confidential Memo  
SEXUAL HEALTH EDUCATION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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- ✦ **Supporting local advocacy efforts conducted by (Arch)dioceses with schools districts as needed.** Implementing sexual health education, by law, is a local school district issue. However, how this is done can vary dramatically among the over 1,000 districts in our state. Catholic families in each (Arch)diocese are served by numerous independent districts. For example, within the three counties of the Archdiocese of San Francisco alone, there are 42 school districts. There may be no concerns with most districts' instruction on human sexuality, while others are of tremendous concern. Each (Arch)diocese must decide whether or not to advocate for themselves with particular district(s) on the issue. While the CCC does not lobby on behalf of (Arch)dioceses in this arena, we can advise, and our Catholic Legislative Network can be utilized to assist in communicating with elected school boards.
- ✦ **Advocating state legislation to increase parent oversight of age-appropriate sexual health education of their children, while strengthening parental rights and responsibilities to “supervise” instruction in sexual health.** The CCC is currently collaborating with a coalition of organizations to advocate support for SB 673, which will be heard by the Senate Education Committee in January 2020. This legislative measure would further ensure that any sexual health education is indeed “age-appropriate”, that all parents would be able to review all curricular materials through every school district's website, and that provides parents with active consent (“Opt-in”) for comprehensive sexual health education that may be taught to young children in Grades TK-6.

In addition, the CCC is initiating discussions with California's Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) to ensure that parents' legal rights/responsibilities, regarding the comprehensive sexual health education of their children, are honored. While the law's deference to parents is commendable, there is inconsistency and confusion on how it is being implemented among school districts across the state. We seek the SPI's support and assistance in reconciling this matter.

- ✦ **Assisting to identify alternative human sexuality curriculums that Catholic families could utilize if they “Opt-out” in part or entirely of what's being offered in public schools.** The CCC asked our Catholic school superintendents to suggest curricular resources that may be used. Benziger's *Family Life* program (<http://rclbfamilylife.com/>) was recommended for K-8 children as a wholesome understanding of human sexuality based upon Church moral principles. Additional curriculums recommended, by other sources, to the CCC for Grades 7-12 include: *Theology of the Body* (<http://thetheologyofthebody.com>), and *Teen Star* (<http://teenstar.org/program/>). These curriculums are not endorsed by the CCC. They are referenced as resources to be considered by (Arch)dioceses should they choose to offer parish venues or programs to Catholic parents for their public schooled children whom they have excused from sexual health education classes.

Please feel welcome to contact me, either by phone (916-313-4013) or e-mail ([rburnell@cacatholic.org](mailto:rburnell@cacatholic.org)), to offer insights or for clarifications.

Thank you and God bless!

cc: CA Catholic Conference Standing Committee on Education