

California Initiatives Circulating on School Choice

California Catholic Conference Policy and Recommendation

Policy on California Ballot Propositions

The California Catholic Conference staff reviews all statewide ballot initiatives and referenda. The bishops, after appropriate consultation, may choose—either individually or as a conference—to support, oppose, or take no position on each measure. Signature gathering to place an initiative on the California ballot is very rarely permitted and, in the past, has only been allowed for measures which directly protect the sanctity of human life. These policies, as well as further guidelines, are available at <https://cacatholic.org/elections>.

- When neither the California Catholic Conference nor an (arch)diocese has taken a public position on a specific measure, a parish or Catholic organization should not do so without previous consultation with the bishop.
- Granting the use of Church facilities to supporting or opposing groups should rarely be allowed. Only with the specific permission of the diocesan bishop and the local pastor should Church facilities be used for signature gathering to place an initiative on the ballot.
- Although Churches have no jurisdiction over public sidewalks and other public property in their vicinities, Church parking is ordinarily private property and the general public has no right to distribute partisan materials thereon. This may be difficult to control, but parish leaders should nevertheless deny permission for any such activity. Lack of enforcement here may be construed as institutional support for partisan activities.
- All public policy materials distributed in parishes must be prepared by the (arch)diocese, the California Catholic Conference (CCC) or the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB).

School Choice

Several initiatives often circulate regarding the same subject. This is the case with 2021's school choice initiatives. There are currently two versions in California. In evaluating a position, the bishops will consider how a ballot measure advances society and the individual by using the principles of Catholic social teaching:

- First among these principles is promotion of the common good. Robust and caring public and private school systems are essential for guaranteeing the right to a proper education for every child. A quality education from both public and private schools honors the life and dignity of every person.
- Subsidiarity is another principle we must use. The principle of subsidiarity protects people from abuses by higher-level social authority and calls on these same authorities to help individuals and intermediate groups to fulfil their duties. Regarding education, subsidiarity starts with parents, neighborhoods, and communities making decisions at the most practical level.
- Solidarity demands that we work to enhance and expand the educational opportunities of every child. "The benefits of a Catholic school education for these often underserved, minority, and ethnic communities are considerable, in particular for African American, Latino, and Native American students, and especially here in California." write the California Bishops in the 2016 letter, *Our Catholic Schools in California: A Stellar Past, A Robust Future*.ⁱ "Nevertheless, recognizing that nine out of 10 of our Catholic children are enrolled in public schools, we as bishops share a vested interest in the quality of public and charter schools."

Both advancing school choice and supporting excellent public schools achieves a balance of the educational needs of all students and respects the prerogative of parents in choosing the educational opportunities in which their child can thrive and grow. Other jurisdictions have successfully done so. The Opportunity Scholarship

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Program in Washington, DC, for instance, provides scholarships for low-income families to attend private schools *and* provides additional funding and support to public and charter schools in the District of Columbia.

General Principles in Considering Educational Policies

The Catholic Church advocates for the high-quality education of all California students attending our public and private schools from early childhood through college, especially for those most in need.

- As a matter of justice, a quality education is vital to the life and dignity of every person.
- Reforms and resources should advance excellence and equity in education through curriculum that educates the whole child; reliable assessment of progress in student learning; a welcoming and safe learning environment; and local schools flexibility and openness to innovation.
- Teachers have a right to fair, productive and meaningful work. It is also imperative to strengthen and retain great teachers with ongoing professional development.
- Advancing school choice and supporting excellent public schools in a just and effective manner is entirely possible in our American tradition. Other jurisdictions have successfully done so.

ⁱ <https://www.catholic.org/article/our-catholic-schools-california-stellar-past-robust-future>