



January 4, 2016

Nebraska Bishops' Statement on the Nebraska School Activities Association's Policy on Transgender Student Participation

Over the next two weeks, the Nebraska School Activities Association (NSAA) member schools and board of directors will be considering and voting on alternative policies regarding the participation of minors who experience gender dysphoria in high school activities. These alternatives will determine whether, and if so under what conditions, a biological male student can participate as a female in a girls' sport, and a biological female student can participate as a male in a boys' sport. Whichever alternative is chosen also will establish the legal basis for any litigation in Nebraska on important, related issues such as locker room and restroom use, religious liberty, and individual freedom of conscience.

Any person who experiences gender dysphoria is entitled to the respect and dignity that is the right of every human person, as well as genuine concern and the support needed for personal development and well-being. Such support, however, must be provided with due consideration to fairness and the safety, privacy, and rights of all students.

Parents have always appreciated school activities as playing a vital role in the mature development of their school age children. It would be unjust to allow a harmful and deceptive gender ideology to shape either what is taught or how activities are conducted in our schools. This would certainly have a negative impact on students' and society's attitudes towards the fundamental nature of the human person and the family.

Recently, Pope Francis addressed this issue in the context of marriage and the family by stating, "the complementarity of man and woman, the pinnacle of the divine creation, is being questioned by the so-called gender ideology, in the name of a more free and just society. The differences between man and woman are not for opposition or subordination, but for communion and generation, always in the 'image and likeness' of God."

Pope-emeritus Benedict XVI also expressed grave concern about the gender ideology: "The manipulation of nature, which we deplore today where our environment is concerned, now becomes man's fundamental choice where he himself is concerned. From now on there is only the abstract human being, who chooses for himself what his nature is to be. Man and woman in their created state as complementary versions of what it means to be human are disputed. But if there is no pre-ordained duality of man and woman in creation, then neither is the family any longer a reality established by creation."

High schools in the Nebraska panhandle will be voting on January 6th, and high schools in the rest of the state will be voting on January 13th, whether to formally adopt the current NSAA practice that students participate according to their sex at birth. The Nebraska Catholic Conference supports this proposal, and diocesan high schools that are members of the NSAA will be voting in favor of it.

If NSAA member schools fail to pass this or a related proposal, the NSAA board of directors will consider, and possibly approve, a separate policy on January 14th that would open the door to participation by students with gender dysphoria according to their self-identity. If approved, this policy would go into effect immediately on January 14th. The Nebraska Catholic Conference strongly opposes this new policy being considered by the NSAA board of directors.

We strongly urge all NSAA member schools to vote in favor of the “sex on the certificate at birth” bylaw amendment proposal at their district meetings on January 6th and 13th.

More information is available at the Nebraska Catholic Conference website, www.necatholic.org.

Most Rev. George J. Lucas, Archbishop of Omaha
Most Rev. James D. Conley, Bishop of Lincoln
Most Rev. Joseph G. Hanefeldt, Bishop of Grand Island