California's Problems Not Just About Power

Feb. 7, 2001

Although California decisively defeated a school voucher initiative on the ballot last November, its legislature may have done more to promote school choice than the defeated proposal could have done. Two controversial California state laws, enacted last year by a one-vote margin and effective on New Year's Day, mandate "diversity" teaching at all grade levels in order to promote tolerance of diverse sexual orientation.

To no one's surprise, this has caused an uproar among parents. A coalition called the California Student Exemption Project has launched a major drive to help parents remove their children from such teaching. The Project is distributing an easy-to-use Student Exemption form addressed to school board members, superintendents, principals and teachers, citing eleven sections of the California Education Code that assure parents this right.

AB 1785 requires the California Board of Education to revise state guidelines about curriculum and teacher training to include "human relations education, with the aim of fostering an appreciation of the diversity of California's population and discouraging the development of discriminatory attitudes and practices." The law covers kindergarten through grade 12 and provides supplemental resources to assure that this teaching includes immigrant children.

This law also requires schools to collect data on so-called "hate crimes" and report them to the state Department of Education, which will share the data with the state Department of Justice. "Evidence of hostility" includes even telephone calls and mail.

AB 1931 allows school children to be taken on field trips to "participate in educational programs focused on fostering ethnic sensitivity, overcoming racism and prejudice, and countering hatred and intolerance." These terms are not defined and there is no limit on how "tolerance" could be interpreted.

This law appropriates $2 million for these "tolerance" field trips in order to address "intolerance," "hatred," and "prejudice." Another $150,000 is granted to an undisclosed "tolerance" organization to provide training programs for school personnel.

Nobody is fooled about the real meaning and goals of these laws. It was widely reported and admitted that AB 1785 will promote the acceptance of homosexuality and bisexuality by shaping the attitudes of schoolchildren and empowering gay organizations to go into the schools, and that AB 1931 will fund subjective programs that can easily be used by gay groups to teach children to approve of behavior that many parents consider objectionable.

The P.E.R.S.O.N. Project, an internet website supporting the teaching about "diversity of sexual orientation" in public schools, has posted the two laws as legislative victories for the year 2000. The Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) and Parents,

Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) were active in promoting passage of these laws.

The Coalition distributing the Student Exemption form includes the Pacific Justice Institute (PJI), the Campaign for California Families, Life Legal Defense Foundation, the Pro-Family Law Center, and the U.S. Justice Foundation (a private group). PJI began this effort by announcing its Parental Opt-Out Program on December 28.

The comprehensive form states that it is a legal notice, pursuant to federal and state laws, telling the school "not to teach, instruct, advise, counsel, discuss, test, question, examine, survey or in any way provide information data or images to my child(ren)" concerning sex education, pupil's or their parents' personal beliefs or practices in sex and religion, sexually transmitted diseases, gender identity, sexual orientation, homosexuality issues, or "any alternatives to monogamous heterosexual marriage," without the parent's express written permission on an incident-by-incident basis.

The form further advises the school that this exemption form extends to classroom instruction, displays, assignments, discussions, printed and electronic materials, field trips, assemblies, theatrical performances in school, and extracurricular school activities.

The exemption form is carefully written to comply with and implement California state law. Section 51240 of the California Education Code provides a specific option for families with religious convictions about sexuality issues, including "personal moral convictions."

Section 51554 requires schools to give parents "written notification" of instruction on "sexually transmitted diseases, AIDS, human sexuality or family life that is delivered by an outside organization or guest speakers."

The Student Exemption form is specific to California. Its sponsors hope that it can become a model tool for parents nationwide since gay pressure groups are moving rapidly to get their agenda included in all public schools.