Texas Catholic Conference of Bishops
THE PUBLIC POLICY VOICE OF THE CHURCH

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Bishops of Texas Dedication to the Protection of Children

An underlying tenet of the Catholic faith is that every child is a unique creation of God. This tenet of the faith animates the mission of Catholic schools in Texas. The Bishops of Texas are resolved that Catholic schools are to address the spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and physical well-being of each child in a safe, nurturing, and faith-filled environment that reflects the dignity of every human person created in the image and likeness of God. As such, the Catholic Bishops of Texas have implemented several policies consistent with our Catholic faith to provide a safe and nurturing environment for all students and staff members.

In furthering the goals of Catholic education, the Bishops of Texas have appropriately addressed issues regarding creation of this environment for students in Catholic Schools in Texas.

1. Preventative Health Policy. The health of the children and staff members attending Catholic schools is addressed, in part, through immunization requirements and disease prevention. The focus of Catholic schools is not only on the physical wellness of the children through the immunization policy and requirements of physical education within the curriculum, but also on protecting those students and staff who have immune-compromised conditions who need to be protected from these illnesses by those around them.

2. Mental Health. The Catholic Bishops continue to encourage schools to develop policies and procedures to focus on issues related to mental health, including but not limited to policies related to providing counseling assistance, addressing bullying, and providing for recess time to refresh body and mind.

3. Safe Environments. All Catholic schools are required to comply with the implementation of the Bishops' *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*[1] as specified by the local diocesan bishop. The employees and volunteers of each Catholic school are required to comply with the diocesan program adopted in compliance with the Charter. TCCB requires that each diocesan Office of Catholic Schools establish clear expectations and procedures for preventing, identifying, and reporting suspected child abuse and neglect in compliance with Texas law. In addition, Catholic school personnel are required to receive training to recognize, respond to, and report child abuse or neglect on an annual basis.

The Bishops of Texas also adopted a policy that requires all Catholic schools to perform a thorough national criminal history check prior to employment of all personnel who will have contact with a student at a Catholic school. Each diocese is required to adopt a policy for uniform fingerprint-based background check requirements. Results from the criminal background check must be reviewed, and clearance granted, before individuals may begin duties involving student contact. In compliance with Texas laws, Catholic schools are required to review the registry of persons not eligible for employment in educational entities prior to offering employment to any individual employed by a Catholic school. Catholic schools are required to discharge, refuse to hire, or terminate a person listed on the registry.