



The Diocese of Knoxville

805 S. Northshore Drive, Knoxville, TN 37919
(865) 584-3307 Fax (865) 584-7538
www.dioknox.org

Living our Roman Catholic faith in East Tennessee

November 28, 2023

Dear Paula,

The leadership of St. John Neumann Catholic School (SJNCS) and the Diocese of Knoxville's Catholic Schools Office have invested a significant amount of time over the past eight weeks discussing your story of Sept. 28 which focused on a few parents who anonymously expressed dissatisfaction with teaching methods used at SJNCS.

We feel the story was incomplete and personally insulting to the SJNCS principal, and we expressed this view in a letter to the school and parish family on Oct. 2.

Because it's been shared on the internet, the story continues to unfairly place our leaders in a position to defend teaching methods that are firmly rooted in Catholic doctrine and teaching. It is regrettable that your publication did not make more than a perfunctory attempt to reach us for clarification before the story was published.

SJNCS has never denied Social Emotional Learning, the process of learning about each person's journey with individual and social awareness, which we (and other Catholic schools) believe helps students understand and emulate Jesus Christ through the virtues of compassion, kindness, empathy, and love. SJNCS does not endorse teaching about lifestyles that conflict with Catholic and Christian beliefs. Unfortunately, the story allowed a small group of agitated parents to push a narrative that it does. This isn't accurate. Furthermore, SJNCS often reviews its curriculum and teaching methods and omits portions that don't comply with, or reflect, Catholic beliefs.

No part of Second Step that conflicted with Catholic teachings was planned for use in any way; no survey was given to students regarding SEL; religion classes are not being replaced; we have not "dodged" parents who had questions; and homework is being sent home every day— much to the dismay of the students, perhaps?

Additionally, it is very concerning the story included a quote that was an unjustified and damaging attack on our principal's character and professionalism.

Because The Tennessee Conservative claims to publish only the truth, we believe the article should be taken down since, in this case, it doesn't meet that standard.

Our schools are Catholic. We teach our faith. We provide our students with an academic environment that allows them to learn and flourish. We open our doors and hearts to work with parents to form scholars, leaders, and saints, and we are always open to discussing how we do this.

Sincerely,

Jim Wogan
Director of Communications
Diocese of Knoxville