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The Archdiocese of Portland, Oregon, is asserting that the unexpected decision to close its Catholic schools office is not connected to backlash from local educators and parents over Archbishop Alexander Sample's new [gender identity document](#) for young people.

The move is also unconnected to Sample's endorsement of a classical model of education, says the archdiocese.

On Saturday, June 24, the original notice on the archdiocesan website about the closure of the department, which left unclear who would oversee Catholic schools across Western Oregon, stated the decision had been made to "reevaluate how to best integrate schools more fully into our mission."

Early this week, the following [was added](#): "The decision is unrelated to the publication of *A Catholic Response to Gender Identity Theory* or to one school adopting a classical education model."



Archbishop Alexander Sample of Portland, Oregon, returns to his seat after receiving Communion during Mass at the Basilica of St. John Lateran in Rome Feb. 4, 2020. (CNS/Paul Haring)

The initial announcement of the closure of the Catholic schools office [triggered speculation and confusion](#) across the Portland Archdiocese. The closure came amid criticism of the gender identity document — which forbids the use of names, pronouns and bathrooms other than those corresponding to a person's "biological sex" — and concerns over more archdiocesan schools becoming affiliated with the [Institute for Catholic Liberal Education](#).

Members of the Catholic school community told NCR in the late afternoon June 27 that the updated notice did not assuage their fears and seems a piecemeal approach to communication. "It's raised so many questions," said Charlene Hannibal, a parent of students at All Saints School in Portland.

The archdiocese did not respond to multiple inquiries from NCR.

On the afternoon of June 27, the principal of All Saints sent a letter to school families informing them of the revised statement and saying that during the closure, archdiocesan Catholic schools will be supported by an advisory committee of three principals "assembled by the archbishop's leadership team."

In addition, a remaining member of the department's staff, Denise Ramsden, with the title "Department of Catholic Schools coordinator," will continue in her role.

A senior leader in the archdiocese who asked not to be named for fear of retribution told NCR earlier this week that, along with the closure, the positions of archdiocesan superintendent and associate superintendent were eliminated.

The archdiocesan leader also said school pastors would be charged with overseeing their schools. Some pastors, meanwhile, told their communities last week that chancery staff would coordinate certain services of the schools department.

Hannibal said she was concerned about the advisory committee of principals. "Who are they, and what are the qualifications for them?" she said. "Will they be people who've passed a litmus test and will take a conservative approach around gender identity, believing it's a theory and not real?"

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The gender identity document, [released in January](#), says that a Catholic understanding of the human person "is at odds with 'gender identity theory,' a framework that is increasingly dominant in Western culture."

"According to this model, one's identity as a man, woman, or both/neither is based solely on subjective self-perception," says the document.

The department is closed, according to the website statement, as the archdiocese reevaluates how to integrate schools more fully into its mission.

But Hannibal said schools already operated in a "beautiful way."

"In my view, the mission was love, acceptance and strong education in a Catholic community."

A leader of the group who organized the petition expressing concerns about the gender identity document — who spoke on condition of anonymity so as not to jeopardize the possibility of dialogue — told NCR the group had not heard from Sample as of June 28 but that they plan to continue to pursue their goal, which is to "sit down with the archbishop and have a conversation with him."

"We want to ask the archbishop to help us understand where he is coming from and for him to listen to where we are coming from, where his constituents are coming from — we are the church," said the leader, a lifelong Catholic. "We are not trying to be radical or damning but asking for a few minutes of his time."