

Iphigenia in Chesterfield

The fact that Chesterfield County Public Schools (CCPS) is scheduled to open on Monday with no plan in place to protect girls from molestation in their bathrooms (now that the state is mandating that any boy can enter any girl's bathroom) profoundly demonstrates how CCPS cares less about imminent harm to students than about the possibility of offending two key special-interest groups: the teachers' unions and the gender-rights activists. Apparently, CCPS does not think it has enough political cover to proactively prevent the harm that will now inevitably be visited upon many girls. Apparently, they're waiting for those girls to get hurt first, and only then will be willing to take the necessary steps to ensure that more harm does not take place. (The obvious necessary step that must be taken is that adult-female monitors must now be placed in all girls' bathrooms.)

The contrast with CCPS' purported concern for student safety last year could not be more stark. For the first half of last year CCPS was unwilling to open the schools because of a stated concern for student safety--even though all health experts agreed that students were at such a low medical risk that the certain psychological/social harm that would be caused by keeping the schools closed far outweighed the biological risks students would face were they to be opened.

This year, by contrast, the inevitable catastrophic injury many female students will now suffer is not yet a sufficient reason to make the structural changes that must inevitably be made to restore safety in girls' bathrooms. CCPS is clearly waiting until the first few girls are sexually assaulted before they take those necessary special-interest-offending steps.

Once several girls are harmed (a harm which will surely occur within the first few weeks of school), CCPS will then feel it has enough political cover to insist that female teachers lose some of their planning period to monitor girls' bathrooms. Taking that step will create a firestorm of opposition from both the CEA (Virginia's version of the NEA) and the gender-rights activists. The CEA will be apoplectic that teachers' quality of life will have taken a nosedive. The gender-rights activists will be furious because the new policy of requiring teachers in girls' bathrooms will create a tremendous backlash of resentment against their newly-created prerogative. The new intrusion into everyone's lives will generate enormous pressure on the gender-rights activists to back down to their former position (where, after all, all gender-sensitive students already had access to gender-neutral bathrooms).

So CCPS's response to the new state mandate to allow all boys to enter any girls' bathroom is a complete abdication of responsibility which, in turn, demonstrates a profound lack of leadership. It clearly shows that those in charge are only willing to make the necessary changes to protect student safety when they feel they have enough political cover to do so--and even though waiting for that political cover will inevitably entail the sacrifice of many girls' physical and emotional well-being. It clearly demonstrates that CCPS cares less about actual harm to students than about offending special-interest allies. How much more of this dysfunction must we observe before the public understands the profound need to fundamentally change the leadership at CCPS?