

School drops Mother's Day over gay parents' feelings

By Andrea Billups
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An elite private Jewish school in New York City has outraged some parents by its decision to do away with Mother's Day and Father's Day activities as a way to protect the feelings of children raised by same-sex couples, single parents or grandparents.

Letters were sent to parents on Friday explaining the Rodeph Shalom Day School's ban on holidays that traditionally celebrate moms and dads, according to the New York Post, which first reported the story. The ban on those holidays applies to children 4 years old and older. The tony coed school, located on the Upper West Side, teaches students from pre-kindergarten through the sixth grade.

"Families in our society are now

diverse and varied," wrote the school's director of the lower elementary division, Cindi Samson, in a letter to parents — among them tennis star John McEnroe. "We are a school with many different family makeups, and we need to recognize the emotional well-being of all our children in the school."

Last year, according to parents, students at the \$15,000-\$20,000 per-year tuition school, made cards for their mothers to celebrate Mother's Day and decorated soup cans for Father's Day that their dads could use as pen holders. This year, those activities are no more, prompting one mother to tell the Post that the ban amounts to an attack on families.

"There are ways of showing sensitivity to the needs of children in unusual situations that don't require undermining traditional family

structures," the mom told the Post. "This is an inappropriate and politically correct response."

Miss Samson said the decision on the ban was made for several reasons, not simply in response to pressures from homosexual parents whose children attend the school. She did not return a call from The Washington Times for comment.

"One is, it didn't serve an academic and educational need," she told the Post of the holiday activities. "No. 2, families are changing. Some children were very uncomfortable.

"There may be two fathers, two mothers, the mother may not have custody, it could be a grandmother," she said of the students' home life, noting that "recognition of these holidays in a social setting may not be a positive experience for all children."

Peter LaBarbera, senior policy

analyst at the Culture and Family Institute in Washington, a group affiliated with Concerned Women for America, calls the ban at the Rodeph Shalom school typical of what is happening in other schools across the country.

"It's a case of letting the extreme bring down what is normal and good," Mr. LaBarbera said. "It strikes me as liberal sensitivity run amok. They are ruining it for everyone else."

The ban comes a little more than a week before Mother's Day, which is celebrated this year on Sunday. The holiday was first observed in 1907 at a church in Grafton, W.Va., honoring a mother there, Mrs. Anna Reese Jarvis. On May 8, 1914, Congress passed a joint resolution designating the second Sunday in May as Mother's Day, and President Woodrow Wilson established it as a

national holiday.

Father's Day, first celebrated in 1910 became a national holiday in 1972. This year it is celebrated June 17.

A spokeswoman from the New York City-based Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund, a group founded to protect the civil rights of homosexuals, declined comment on the school's decision because she did not have enough details about the ban. A spokesman for the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) in New York also declined to comment because he had not seen the story.

National Review Online editor Jonah Goldberg, an alumnus of the Rodeph Shalom school, decried the policy as the wrong lesson to teach children whose parents are in fact nontraditional.

"No one's doing the children of

gay and lesbian couples any favors by teaching them that Mother's Day doesn't exist or that it's a mean, non-inclusive holiday," he wrote in a column published in yesterday's online edition.

"Their self-esteem may suffer a fraction of a fraction of a percentage point as they watch a bunch of kids draw cards for their mommies. But, understanding they're different from the majority is a lesson they're going to have to learn no matter what, as the children of gays — and as Jews.

"Just as Jewish kids do far better in life when they have a healthy respect for Christianity, the children of homosexuals — and homosexuals themselves — would be well-served if they showed others a little respect, too," he wrote. "Denying Mother's Day will not change the fact that most people have mothers."