

Update on Sex Ed Curriculum for 8th and 10th grades:

Submitted by Tracy Fox, MPH, RD, MCCPTA Rep to the Citizens Advisory Committee on Family Life and Human Development (CAC for short)

On Tuesday, January 9th, the Montgomery County Board of Education unanimously approved a revised sex education curriculum, including a 7 minute video on condom use (for 10th graders) and 8th and 10th grade lessons on sexual orientation. The curriculum will be piloted this spring in three middle and high schools (school selection has not occurred yet).

For the last year, the Citizens Advisory Committee on Family Life and Human Development (CAC) has spent many hours over the course of a dozen meetings analyzing and commenting on the proposed lessons as presented by MCPS staff. This time consuming but necessary process included serious consideration of hundreds of recommended changes and amendments.

MCPS accepted 69 of 83 CAC recommendations in presenting the revised curricula to the BOE.

The revised materials have been met with both compliments and criticism. While the majority of CAC members view the changes as appropriate and scientifically based, with important discussions on tolerance and empathy, stereotyping and generalizations, how to report harassment, and above all the importance of abstinence as the only sure way to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, a number of members and others feel that the video and curricula do not go far enough in discussing the specific risks of anal sex as well as discussing ex-gays.

At the Jan. 9th BOE meeting, an important addition to the 8th grade curriculum was made to make it consistent with the 10th grade curriculum. The addition instructs teachers to tell students that “sexual orientation is innate and a complex part of one’s personality.” This statement was in the 10th grade curriculum but was overlooked and now will be added to the 8th grade materials. Most of the CAC members felt strongly that this fact should be explicitly included in the course materials. While the statement regarding the “innate and complex” nature of sexual orientation is an important addition, most members would have liked to have seen more context for that statement to show that it reflects the positions of mainstream medical and mental health organizations like the American Medical Association, the American Psychological Association, and the American Academy of Pediatrics.

Next Steps:

Pilot testing will provide MCPS and others with important information to gauge student learning and capture questions that are raised. MCCPTA will be following the pilot testing closely and updating members on the status of the issue.

Background on Sexual Orientation and Condom Video lessons and the “Opt-In” requirement:

The portion of the health education curriculum that was revised and voted on by BOE is a small – but vital – segment of the total health education curriculum for 8th and 10th graders. For example, the 8th grade health ed curriculum is 9 weeks long; the sexual orientation segment is comprised of TWO 45 minute lessons, or less than 5% of the overall health education curriculum for 8th graders.

The 10th grade health ed curriculum is 18 weeks long; the sexual orientation segment is comprised of TWO 45 minute lessons, and the condom use segment and video are covered in ONE 45 minute lesson; these three lessons comprise about 3% of the overall health education curriculum for 10th grade.

Unlike most courses offered throughout MCPS, there are components within the health education curriculum - specifically the Family Life and Human Development lessons and the Disease Prevention lessons, in which parents – and students – must affirmatively elect to participate. So, parents who disagree with the curriculum, who would rather provide important information about human sexuality and disease prevention to their son or daughter in another way, or simply not provide it at all, may choose not to participate. In fact, a written statement from parents must be on file indicating that they are aware of the areas that will be covered and must indicate whether their son or daughter will or will not participate.

Web Link for Curricula:

The Board agenda has a link to the lessons:

<http://www.mcps.k12.md.us/boe/meetings/agenda/2006-07/2007-0109/BoardHealthEdPaper1-9-07.pdf>