

Kyrene Health Committee members Debbie and Jeff Kirkpatrick go over the district's expanded health curriculum with concerned parent Scott McCurdy during an August meeting.



Photo by Jason Ludwig/AFN

New sex ed. materials open for perusal

By Jason Ludwig
Staff Writer

Interested to see what your child's school will be telling him or her about sex?

The Kyrene School District has opened up for public review the classroom materials that will be used in its controversial expanded health curriculum. Supplements for the growth and development unit for third through eighth grade, as well as the sexually transmitted infections (STIs) unit for third through eighth grade, include videos, PowerPoint presentations and teachers' guides to potential questions and discussion points.

Additionally, at every review station in the district office, a form is furnished encouraging viewers to respond to what they see.

Sure to generate some feedback is the update that sparked the most controversy since the curriculum was first under consideration for expansion: that of including anal and oral sex in the definition of sexual intercourse. The updated definition appears for the first time in the PowerPoint presentation for the sixth-grade STI unit.

"Sexual intercourse does not just refer to contact between penis and vagina (vaginal sex)," reads the presentation. "Sexual intercourse also includes contact between mouth and genitals (oral sex). Sexual intercourse also includes contact between genitals and anus (anal sex)."

The presentation then defines abstinence as "voluntarily not doing or not having something," then applies the definition by saying, "sexual abstinence means not having vaginal sex, not having oral sex, and not having anal sex."

That aspect of the curriculum, presented to sixth-graders, had drawn concern from parents who felt that the information was too advanced for students at that age.

"We're talking about teaching sixth-grade kids stuff we should be teaching them at grades nine, 10, 11 and 12," said district parent Sudeep Mehta at the Kyrene board meeting in which the changes were adopted. "By expanding the curriculum you are forcing me to have conversations with my kids I'd rather not have in grade six. I'd rather talk to my kids about pre-algebra and not oral and vaginal sex."

But health officials, within the district and without, have argued that the topic, however uncomfortable it is to talk about, must be broached.

"If people have a problem with oral, anal and vaginal sex, I'm not comfortable taking it out [of the curriculum], because kids are doing it," Kyrene health director Susanna Yost said at a Kyrene study session on the curriculum. "Whether or not parents say, 'I don't want my kid hearing about anal sex at school,' kids are hearing about it. The only difference is whether they hear it from a teach-

er or they hear it in the bathroom. Or if they hear it on MTV, or on MySpace."

Controversy, to a lesser extent than the definition of intercourse, also swirled around the curriculum's expanded approach to STI education. Information is provided beyond HIV/AIDS education, also discussing gonorrhea, Chlamydia, syphilis, HPV (human papillomavirus or genital warts), HSV (herpes simplex virus) and trichomoniasis.

Information on STIs in the new materials starts in third and fourth grade with a claymation video titled *Greetings From Cell Beach*. The video introduces how viruses and the immune system function.

Grades four and five are presented with videos about staying safe from HIV/AIDS, and in grade six a more general lesson on STIs is presented through PowerPoint presentations. By grades seven and eight, the STI lessons are much more detailed, with the seventh-grade PowerPoint presentation delving into HIV/AIDS and the eighth-grade presentation focusing on the details of other STIs.

A final controversy, drawing concern from some community members and health officials, is the abstinence-only nature of the curriculum. While the materials up for review don't specifically encourage abstinence as a means to avoid STIs or unwanted preg-

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Health education: times have changed



The Kyrene Beat

by Dr. David Schauer

Superintendent of Kyrene School District

We have come a long way in how we currently teach health and human growth and development from my experiences in a small town in Illinois in the late 1970s.

I was teaching fifth grade at the time and the instructions were to divide the boys and the girls for a couple of sessions related to this topic. The school nurse took charge of the girls and a colleague and I had the boys. No resources were provided and very little guidance was given on exactly what it was we were supposed to talk about. The main strategy we used was to have the boys write questions on index cards and submit them to us so we could attempt to provide answers. You can well imagine what some of those questions were, and how we struggled with what to say and what not to say. Somehow we got through the experience, but it is one that I will never forget!

The updating of the Kyrene health curriculum and the recent initiation of the 60-day review process for the school community to examine lessons and materials has been a controversial topic of discussion in our school district. This should come as no surprise as the points of view on this are just as diverse nationally as they are in our local community. That is why the district has taken steps to make sure that all voices are heard so we can come to some agreements as a community about how we want to handle this sensitive yet

very important topic for the youth of Kyrene.

These steps include expanding the original Health Committee to over 30 people to offer an opportunity to participate to anyone who was interested in being part of the discussion. We are also offering opportunities during regular business hours, designated evenings and Saturdays to provide time for the community to review the lessons and materials.

We know that our schools should be a reflection of what the community desires and values for the education of its children, and we continue to do our best to ensure this happens. Community input is desired, welcomed and used as we make decisions about this issue and many others.

Materials are available for review in the curriculum room at the Ben Furlong Education Center, 8700 S. Kyrene Road in Tempe, through Tuesday, March 27, during posted operating hours. In addition, there will be three Saturday viewings: Jan. 20, 8 a.m. to noon; Feb. 3, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.; and Feb. 24, noon to 4 p.m. There will also be three evening information sessions from 6 to 8 p.m. Jan. 29, Feb. 26 and March 6.

For more information, please call (480) 783-4127.

Dr. David Schauer is the superintendent of the Kyrene School District. He can be reached by e-mail at dschau@kyrene.org.