

Montclair schools unveil draft form of sex education curriculum



FILE PHOTO

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Montclair's schools have unveiled a [draft version](#) of a family life and sexuality curriculum that will be implemented on a trial basis this fall.

Parents have been petitioning for an updated sex education curriculum in the Montclair schools for several years and complaining that their children, depending on what schools they attended, received little to no education on health and

sexuality topics.

The topic was widely discussed in April after parents of Glenfield Middle School students protested a planned presentation by an outside group, First Choice Women's Resource Center. The talk was canceled when parents complained to the Board of Education about the group's abstinence-only emphasis. Parents and school board members also objected to its perceived religious leanings.

At a July 10 BOE meeting, curriculum director Debbe Evans and physical education teacher Bianca Brown gave the board and the audience an update on the curriculum rollout, which will start on a trial basis in the fall.

Age Appropriate

The new curriculum has a tiered instruction plan for each grade level, addressing different aspects of physical and sexual health. For example, in kindergarten and lower elementary grades, children would learn about different kinds of families and friendships. They would learn the names of different parts of the body, including the correct words for male and female genitalia. This would include teaching children about the difference between "good" touching and "bad touching," and what to do in the event of inappropriate touching.

For fourth- and fifth-graders, the curriculum would include a discussion of the physical changes that occur during puberty.

In middle school, the curriculum would include learning about social and cognitive changes associated with puberty, assumptions about gender roles, the concept of self-image and the portrayals of the "ideal" body in the media, and what constitutes a healthy relationship. This section of the curriculum also includes discussions of contraception, abstinence and sexually-transmitted diseases.

In high school, the curriculum would include topics such as LGBTQ issues, gender identity, and physical and emotional

abuse in a relationship.

Preparing Students for Life

School staff working on the curriculum have included Evans, Brown, nursing supervisor Betty Strauss and physical education teacher Lorraine Krimmel. The district has also been working with Dr. Eva Goldfarb, a professor of public health at Montclair State University.

The plan is for teachers who will be teaching health-related topics to undergo some professional development courses starting in September.

“It is so very, very necessary. Teaching health is such an honor; it’s different from teaching other academic courses that the students take,” Brown said during the July 10 meeting. “We literally prepare them for life.”

One of the concerns was addressing class size, Evans said, since some health classes have taken place in the gym with as many as 70 students attending.