

Office of the Superintendent of Schools  
MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
Rockville, Maryland

January 9, 2007

MEMORANDUM

To: Members of the Board of Education

From: Jerry D. Weast, Superintendent of Schools

Subject: Revisions to the Grade 8 and Grade 10 Health Education Curriculum

**Executive Summary**

I am recommending the Board of Education approve for field-testing three revisions to the health education curriculum of the Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) for students in Grade 8 and Grade 10. The revisions consist of three lessons: (1) a two-part 90-minute lesson on “Respect for Differences in Human Sexuality” in Grade 8, (2) a two-part 90-minute lesson on the next segment of that curriculum in Grade 10, and (3) a one-part 45-minute lesson on condom use including a condom use demonstration video in Grade 10 (Attachments A, B, and C). These revised lessons replace the curriculum approved by the Board of Education in 2004 and subsequently withdrawn in May 2005 following a federal court challenge. If approved, the revised lessons will be field-tested this spring in preparation for systemwide implementation in the 2007–2008 school year.

**Background**

The revised lessons reflect a considerable undertaking by professional educators. The lessons were designed in consultation with four physicians recommended by the Maryland Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics who served as volunteer medical consultants. The physicians, whose expertise includes pediatrics and adolescent health, made important contributions to the staff’s work concerning the design, content, format, and sequencing of age-appropriate lessons for students in the two grade levels. The work produced three revised lessons, consistent with the direction given by the Board of Education on May 23, 2005. All of the published materials to be used with the lessons were reviewed and approved by the required evaluation and selection committee, in accordance with Board of Education Policy IIB, *Evaluation and Selection*, and administrative Regulation IIB-RA, *Evaluation and Selection of Instructional Materials and Library Books*. The Citizens Advisory Committee on Family Life and Human Development (CAC) was asked to review the revised lessons and video and provide its feedback and suggestions. The CAC, which the Board reconstituted in July 2005, includes 15 members from among parents, students, community members, physicians, health care

professionals, and representatives of specific organizations, including those of the plaintiffs in the 2005 federal suit, Citizens for a Responsible Curriculum (CRC) and Parents and Friends of Ex-Gays and Gays (PFOX). The committee met extensively from August through November 2006 and submitted two reports and 83 proposed changes (Attachments D and E). The final recommendations to the Board reflect the great majority of the committee's proposals wherever appropriate and consistent with the curriculum objectives. A summary list of the CAC proposals and staff responses are attached for the Board's review and information (Attachment F). In addition, a "minority report" was received and forwarded earlier to the Board on behalf of one member of the advisory committee and two organizations represented on the committee, CRC and PFOX. That report and the public comments on this topic were reviewed and taken under advisement in the development of the recommended revisions.

The two revised lessons on "Respect for Differences in Human Sexuality" replace two earlier lessons that were approved by the Board of Education in November 2004 for Grade 8 and Grade 10 to introduce the topic of sexual variations. Those lessons were developed following a change directed by the Board in 2002 in administrative Regulation IGP-RA, *Implementation of Programs on Family Life and Human Development*. That change deleted the sentence: "Direct questions from students regarding sexual variation may be briefly and objectively answered with no solicitation or discussion." The change allowed inclusion of sexual variations as a topic in health education, pursuant to the Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) §13A.04.18.03(B)(3). The earlier lessons were subsequently withdrawn by the Board in May 2005 following a federal court suit by CRC and PFOX and a temporary restraining order issued by the court. At that time, a condom use demonstration lesson and video also were withdrawn.

The revised lessons respond to the Board of Education's direction on May 23, 2005, for "the superintendent to research, develop, and recommend new revisions" to the curriculum on family life and human sexuality for Grades 8 and 10, including revisions "to address the issue of sexual variations, as provided in COMAR." On June 9, 2005, the Board approved a settlement agreement with the plaintiffs in the federal suit. A month later on July 6, 2005, the Board reconstituted the CAC to its present membership and responsibilities.

## **Process**

The revised lessons were developed in accordance with Board of Education Policy IFA, *Curriculum*, and administrative Regulation IFA-RA, *Curriculum*. The revised lessons are consistent with a new curriculum framework that was developed by professional educators and approved by the Board of Education on April 20, 2006, for the entire health education curriculum in kindergarten through Grade 12. The framework aligns with the Maryland State Voluntary Curriculum for health education and provides the sequence of indicators and objectives for the curriculum. The portions of the framework that cover Standard 4, Family Life and Human Sexuality, and Standard 7, Disease Prevention and Control, were prepared in consultation with the medical consultants and reviewed by the reconstituted CAC. The revised lessons are the first components of the health education curriculum to be developed within the new framework.

The four medical consultants who assisted staff are affiliated with the Children's National Medical Center (CNMC) in Washington, D.C. Three of the physicians also are on the faculty of the George Washington University Medical School. All four are residents of Montgomery County, and three

have children in MCPS. The medical consultants are: Dr. Lawrence D'Angelo, chief of the Division of Adolescent and Young Adult Medicine, CNMC; Dr. Jennifer Maehr, director, School-based Clinics in Prince George's County Public Schools; Dr. Rachel Moon, director of academic development, Goldberg Center for Community Pediatric Health, CNMC; and Dr. Jennifer Tender of General and Community Pediatrics, CNMC. Their input and willingness to act as resources to staff over the course of several months are reflected in the quality and appropriateness of the revised lessons. Among the many important recommendations from the medical consultants were support for defining sexual variation as sexual orientation and assistance in selecting clear, accurate, age appropriate materials for the lessons. I am especially grateful to these physicians for their time, dedication, and professionalism. I also want to acknowledge the late Dr. Elda Arce, former medical director, Adolescent Health Center, CNMC, who generously gave remarkable advice and counsel in her brief collaboration with staff before succumbing to illness.

I am grateful, as well, to the 15-member CAC for the extensive review of the revised lessons and the important, substantive feedback to staff. The CAC is chaired by Dr. Carol Plotsky, a pediatrician on staff at Shady Grove Adventist Hospital, former chairperson of that hospital's Department of Pediatrics, former president of the hospital's medical staff, and former assistant attorney general for the state of Connecticut. The committee met nine times in hours-long meetings on weeknights over the course of approximately three months, reviewed the staff-proposed lessons and video, and considered more than 200 proposals from individual members regarding suggested changes and additions. Two reports by the committee were submitted; the first on the revised condom use demonstration lesson and video in Grade 10 (Attachment D), and the second on the revised lessons on "Respect for Differences in Human Sexuality" in Grade 8 and Grade 10 (Attachment E). The CAC voted in the majority to support the three revised lessons and video with 83 recommended changes, of which 69 proposed changes (83 percent) were accepted and incorporated, many with modification, in the lessons and video where appropriate and consistent with the curriculum objectives (Attachment F). The CAC was assisted by Ms. Betsy Brown, director of curriculum and instruction; Ms. Lori-Christina Webb, executive assistant to the deputy superintendent of schools; and Mr. Brian J. Porter, chief of staff, who served as my liaison to the committee.

The revised lessons were developed by staff of the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, under the leadership of Ms. Brown. This work was guided by a steering committee led by Dr. Frieda K. Lacey, deputy superintendent of schools. The committee included Ms. Jody Leleck, associate superintendent for curriculum and instruction; Dr. Carey Wright, associate superintendent for special education and student services; members of their offices, and staff from the Office of Organizational Development, as well as Ms. Brown, Ms. Webb, and Mr. Porter. The committee received legal advice throughout the process from Judith Bresler, Esquire, general counsel to the Board of Education, and Maree Sneed, Esquire, of Hogan & Hartson. I also reviewed the revised lessons and video and provided additional guidance for further improvements. In recent weeks, staff worked with secondary school students and teachers of secondary health education to continue to improve the format, sequence, and delivery of the lessons in the prescribed time limits of each class session (45 minutes).

As part of the preparation for the field-testing, a comprehensive training and development plan has been prepared for professional staff in the schools in which the lessons would be field-tested. The training plan and curriculum include specific directions for teachers to follow the lessons in

their entirety as a written script and do not permit teachers to bring in or use resources other than those provided in the lessons.

In addition, alternative lessons are being updated for students who enroll in the affected health education courses (“Health 8” in Grade 8 and “Comprehensive Health Education” in Grade 10) but who do not have their parents’ informed, written consent to participate in (“opt-in”) the entire units on family life and human sexuality and/or disease prevention and control within those courses. The family life and human sexuality units in Grade 8 and Grade 10 include the lessons addressing sexual orientation, and the disease prevention and control unit in Grade 10 includes the condom usage lesson and demonstration video. The updated alternative lessons for the entire units, draft copies of which were provided to the Board of Education on December 22, 2006, will be consistent with the new curriculum framework for health education, as approved by the Board last year, and provide a structured, age-appropriate course of studies in five of the seven standards in the health education curriculum: mental health; tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs; personal and consumer health; safety and injury prevention; and nutrition and fitness. The updated alternative lessons will extend student understanding of health education concepts and processes previously introduced in the courses and engage students in supervised study in an instructional setting at the school. The updated alternative lessons will include the following:

- For Grade 8, seven alternative lessons will be provided for students not participating in the family life and human sexuality unit: health and wellness, goal setting, decision making, communication and conflict resolution, dealing with negative emotions, prescription and over-the-counter drugs, and impact of tobacco addiction. Five other alternative lessons will be provided for students not participating in the disease prevention and control unit: drug prevention and refusal skills, consumer rights and responsibilities, preventing injury, topics in nutrition, and positive habits for a healthful weight. Each alternative lesson is for one class period of 45 minutes.
- For Grade 10, eight alternative lessons will be provided for students not participating in the family life and human sexuality unit: decision making, goal setting, assertiveness, safe driving, violence prevention, spending habits, emergency preparedness, and synthesis. Eight other alternative lessons will be provided for students not participating in the disease prevention and control unit: components of fitness, lifestyle disease obesity, risk factors for obesity, consequences and prevention of obesity, eating disorders, addiction and recovery, consequences of alcohol consumption, and synthesis. Each alternative lesson is for two class periods totaling 90 minutes (except for the lesson on synthesis, the last one in each group, which covers one 45-minute class period).

This extensive preparation provides a long-awaited update of the health education curriculum. The three revised lessons add accurate information and contribute to a high quality curriculum, a noteworthy achievement given the scarcity of available materials and lessons appropriate for the instructional program. Much of the new curriculum, including the video, was developed by MCPS as original work, due in large measure to the ground-breaking steps by the Board of Education to usher in this improvement in health education and the lack of suitable curriculum materials for students nationally. I appreciate the time Board members devoted in advance of this meeting to review the revised lessons in presentation sessions with staff. Members of the CAC also were provided a briefing on the recommendations.

## **Recommendations**

There are three separate lessons and related instructional materials recommended for field-testing this spring. Specifically, the recommendations are:

- Approve for field-testing a two-part lesson in Grade 8 on “Respect for Differences in Human Sexuality” (Attachment A). Each part of the lesson provides 45 minutes of instruction, a total of 90 minutes for the entire lesson over the course of two days. In the first session, students examine negative effects of stereotyping and harassment and positive results of respect, empathy, and tolerance on individuals and the school environment. In the second session, students consider how people respond to differences in gender identity, sexual identity, and sexual orientation.
- Approve for field-testing a two-part lesson in Grade 10 on “Respect for Differences in Human Sexuality” that builds on the Grade 8 lesson with information and materials appropriate for the higher grade level (Attachment B). Each part of the lesson provides 45 minutes of instruction, for a total of 90 minutes for the entire lesson over the course of two days. In the first session, students learn the vocabulary of human sexuality and build on their understanding with factual information, including references to laws that schools must follow to prevent harassment and discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and sexual identity. In the second session, students examine sexual orientation and the challenges related to human sexuality that some adolescents may face.
- Approve for field-testing a single-session lesson in Grade 10 on “Condom Use Demonstration” for the disease prevention and control portion of the curriculum (Attachment C). The 45-minute lesson includes a brief video that demonstrates the correct examination, use, and disposal of a condom. The lesson serves as a bridge between the unit on Family Life and Human Sexuality, which includes information about contraception, and the unit on Disease Prevention and Control, which includes information on sexually transmitted disease and infection. The lesson emphasizes abstinence from sexual activity as the most effective method to prevent unwanted pregnancy and to protect against sexually transmitted disease and infection.

Following Board approval to proceed with field-testing, three middle and three high schools will be selected to participate. The schools will be selected in collaboration with the offices of Curriculum and Instructional Programs and School Performance, the Montgomery County Council of Parent Teacher Associations, and the employee associations.

## **Recommended Resolution**

WHEREAS, The Board of Education and superintendent of schools desire to provide teachers and secondary students of the Montgomery County Public Schools with accurate and comprehensive instruction about family life and human development and disease prevention and control, including information about human sexuality that promotes tolerance and understanding toward people regardless of sexual orientation; and

WHEREAS, Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) §13A.04.18.01 requires each local school system to provide an instructional program in comprehensive health education for each year in kindergarten through Grade 8 and to offer a program in Grade 9 through Grade 12 that enables students to select health education electives; and

WHEREAS, COMAR §13A.04.18.03(B)(3) specifically requires that “Focus Area Three—Advanced Physiology and Psychology of Human Sexual Behavior” of the comprehensive health education program shall include the following areas of emphasis in an elective course, requiring prior consent for participation by a student’s parents/guardians: maturation, the reproductive process, sexual variations, contraception, premarital intercourse, marriage and family responsibilities, family planning, and sexually transmitted diseases; and

WHEREAS, On May 23, 2005, the Board of Education instructed the superintendent “to research, develop, and recommend new revisions” to replace previously approved curriculum withdrawn by the Board that provided lessons on sexual variations for Grade 8 and Grade 10 and a condom use demonstration for Grade 10; and

WHEREAS, The revised lessons and instructional materials were developed in consultation with physicians serving as medical consultants and were reviewed by the Citizens Advisory Committee on Family Life and Human Development, consistent with the provisions of COMAR §13A.04.18.03(D); and

WHEREAS, A staff development plan for training teachers on the revised lessons, a field-testing plan for the revised lessons in middle and high schools for the second semester of the 2006–2007 school year, and updated alternative lessons for students have been developed; now therefore be it

Resolved, That the Board of Education approve the recommended revisions to the curriculum on Health Education and instructional materials for lessons on “Respect for Differences in Human Sexuality” in Grade 8 and Grade 10 and a lesson on “Condom Use Demonstration” in Grade 10, for field-testing in the second semester of the 2006–2007 school year; and be it further

Resolved, That the Board of Education directs the superintendent to inform the Board of Education of the results of the field-testing of the revised lessons and seek its approval at the appropriate time in preparation for systemwide implementation for the 2007–2008 school year.

At the table today are Dr. Frieda K. Lacey, deputy superintendent of schools; Mr. Erick Lang, acting associate superintendent, Office of Curriculum and Instructional Programs; Ms. Betsy Brown, director, Department of Curriculum and Instruction; Dr. Rachel Moon, director of academic development, Goldberg Center for Community Pediatric Health, Children’s National Medical Center, and medical consultant to the school system; and Dr. Carol A. Plotsky, pediatrician and chair, Citizens Advisory Committee for Family Life and Human Development.

JDW:kmy

Attachments