

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

June 12, 2007

MEMORANDUM

To: Members of the Board of Education

From: Jerry D. Weast, Superintendent of Schools

Subject: Final Adoption of Revised Health Education Curriculum

Executive Summary

On January 9, 2007, the Board of Education unanimously approved a field test of the revised Grade 8 and Grade 10 health lessons. The lessons were subsequently field tested in three middle schools and three high schools during March 2007. The approved revisions consist of two 45-minute lessons in both Grade 8 and Grade 10 on respect for differences in human sexuality and a lesson on condom use for Grade 10 students that includes a demonstration DVD. Staff has analyzed feedback collected throughout the field test and made minor revisions to the lessons to improve instruction. These minor revisions do not change the content of the lessons approved by the Board on January 9, 2007. Based upon the results of the field test, I recommend that the revised lessons, with the minor revisions resulting from the field test, be implemented in all middle and high schools beginning school year 2007–2008.

Background

The revised lessons, as approved by the Board of Education on January 9, 2007, responded to the Board'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 the Code of Maryland Administrative Regulations (COMAR)." The revised lessons were developed following issuance of a federal district court temporary restraining order in 2005. On June 9, 2005, the Board approved a settlement agreement with the plaintiffs in the federal suit. In July 2005, the Board reconstituted the Citizens Advisory Committee on Family Life and Human Development (CAC). The 15 member CAC was comprised of parents, students, community members, physicians, health care professionals, and representatives of specific organizations, including the two plaintiffs in the 2005 federal suit, Citizens for a Responsible Curriculum (CRC) and Parents and Friends of Ex-Gays and Gays (PFOX).

The revised lessons were developed in accordance with Board of Education Policy IFA, *Curriculum*, and the Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) Regulation IFA-RA, *Curriculum*. The lessons were consistent with a new curriculum framework approved by the Board of Education on April 20, 2006, for the entire health education curriculum in kindergarten through Grade 12. The framework aligned with the Maryland State Voluntary Curriculum for health education and provided 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 medical professionals and reviewed by the reconstituted CAC. All of the published materials used in 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 MCPS Regulation IIB-RA, *Evaluation and Selection of Instructional Materials and Library Books*.

Field Test Process

Six secondary schools were selected to field test the revised lessons. Training, information, and support were provided to school administrators and staff members during February 2007, and the field tests were conducted during March 2007. Staff has analyzed feedback collected from parents, staff, and students and developed recommendations based on an analysis of that information. The six secondary schools selected represented different geographic areas across the system:

Middle Schools

- Argyle Middle School
- Julius West Middle School
- Westland Middle School

High Schools

- Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School
- Sherwood High School
- Watkins Mill High School

Training

In preparation for the field test, staff in the Office of Organizational Development (OOD), the Department of Communications (DC), and the Office of Curriculum and Instructional Programs (OCIP) developed a comprehensive training plan and delivered one day of training to administrators, health education teachers, resource teachers supervising health education, and counselors in field-test schools. The training addressed communication with staff and community, requirements for informing parents of students in field-test schools, securing parent permission, an overview of the field test and alternative lessons, and the process for collecting feedback.

Communication

In accordance with COMAR and MCPS Regulation IGP-RA, *Implementation of Programs on Family Life and Human Development*, staff at field-test schools sent written notice of the field test and the dates of information meetings to review lesson materials to parents of students in field-test classes at least three weeks before the first day of instruction and at least two weeks before the meetings. School staff distributed general notices of the field test to all parents in a school or

posted information on school Web sites or list serves. In addition, school staff mailed specific notices about the field test and information meetings to parents and guardians of students enrolled in the affected classes and made follow-up calls on ConnectEd.

Opt-in and Alternative Lessons

Teachers collected and kept on file written parent permission forms for students scheduled to participate in the field-test lessons. Students without written parental permission to participate were considered as not opting into the field-test lessons. For students not opting in, school administrators arranged for a professional educator to meet with them in an instructional setting to receive the alternative lesson packets developed by Department of Curriculum and Instruction (DCI) staff. These self-directed alternative lessons addressed indicators and objectives in five content standard areas of the Montgomery County Public Schools approved health education curriculum framework for Grade 8 or Grade 10, as appropriate.

Participation

A total of 821 out of 905 students, or 91 percent, enrolled in the field-test classes opted to participate in the field-test lessons. Ninety-two percent, or 602 out of 656, of high school students opted into the lessons. Eighty-eight percent, or 219 out of 249, of middle school students opted into the lessons. Forty parents of students in field-test classes attended information meetings scheduled to provide the opportunity to review lesson materials and seek clarification about the field test before making a decision about their students' participation. The table below shows the number of students participating in the field test and the number of parents attending the meetings at each school.

Students Opting into Field-Test Lessons

Field-Test Schools	Total Students (N)	Students Participating (N / %)	Students Not Participating (N / %)	Parents Attending Meeting (N / %)
Argyle Middle School	67	60 / 90 %	7 / 10 %	4 / 6 %
Julius West Middle School	66	54 / 82 %	12 / 18 %	8 / 12 %
Westland Middle School	116	105 / 91 %	11 / 9 %	7 / 6 %
Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School	190	187 / 98 %	3 / 2 %	7 / 4 %
Sherwood High School	293	267 / 91 %	26 / 9 %	11 / 4 %
Watkins Mill High School	173	148 / 86 %	25 / 14 %	3 / 2 %
TOTAL	905	821 / 91 %	84 / 9 %	40 / 4 %

Evaluation of Field Test

Staff in the Department of Shared Accountability (DSA) developed survey questions in consultation with OCIP staff to collect feedback from: 1) parents of students in field-test classes who attended the information sessions, 2) field-test teachers, 3) counselors, 4) administrators, and 5) students participating in field-test classes. As requested by Board members on January 9, 2007, students in all field-test classes were given the opportunity to submit questions anonymously to their teachers after the lessons were completed. Those questions were collected and analyzed by DCI staff to determine the frequency of specific topics for which students requested more information or clarification.

Feedback

Analysis of feedback indicates that the training and information provided to administrators, teachers, and counselors allowed them to conduct the field test effectively. They indicated they received timely and meaningful assistance from DCI and DC staff. The only challenges they reported were media persistence in contacting staff, parents, or students; and community members contacting parents by phone or postal mail and providing erroneous information. They indicated they did not receive questions from students as a result of the lessons.

Although principals in the field-test schools mailed notice of information meetings and made ConnectEd calls to remind parents of information meetings to review field-test materials, turnout at the meetings was low at each of the schools. Principals indicated that many parents in their communities also reported receiving automatic phone calls and mailings from outside groups, sometimes more than once, about the field test and the meetings. Of the 40 parents of students in field-test classes who attended information meetings, 32 provided feedback on the meetings. One hundred percent agreed or strongly agreed that they received the information needed to make a decision about their children's participation in the field test.

Teachers indicated the pace and amount of content in the lessons and DVD were appropriate. They reported that in a few sessions, the number of student resource sheets and amount of writing cut down on the time for students to absorb information. They also indicated that some of the readings were difficult for students reading below grade level. Teachers reported the scripted nature of the lesson felt unfamiliar to them, but they understood that it promotes consistency. Their feedback also indicated some confusion about what questions they could or could not answer. In focus groups, the field-test teachers provided suggestions for minor revisions to the lesson materials to improve their effectiveness and manageability.

One hundred thirty-nine of 219 middle school students, or 63 percent, participating in the field test completed a survey to provide feedback on the two revised lessons. One hundred, or 72 percent, of the students responding reported the content of the lessons was clear. Only 47 percent of the students indicated that the pacing worked for them. Five hundred twenty-two of 602 high school students, or 87 percent, participating in the field test completed a survey to provide feedback on the three revised lessons and DVD. Four hundred sixty-eight students, or 90 percent, reported the

content of the lessons was clear. Sixty-one percent of the students indicated that the pacing worked for them. Ninety-one percent of the students reported that the video was very clear or somewhat clear. A few students at each level indicated they were uncomfortable with the scripted nature of the lessons and the difference they perceived in their teachers' instructional styles. Some also expressed interest in having the teachers answer more questions.

Students in Grade 8 and Grade 10 also submitted questions to their teachers anonymously after participating in the lessons. Of the 92 questions submitted, the majority represented single questions on a wide range of topics, many of which the teachers could have answered if they had been asked in class. No strong pattern or trend was revealed in the questions, other than the following: in high school, after the condom usage lesson, 14 questions were asked relating to reproduction and contraception, many of which sought clarification of material presented in the lesson or DVD. After the condom lesson, seven students out of the 821 students participating in the field test asked questions on Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD) and HIV/AIDS. After the human sexuality lessons, seven students asked the meaning of epithet.

Revisions Based on Feedback

It is recommended that the training, information, support, and communication models used in the field test be replicated in a full implementation of the lessons. Professional development will be revised to address instructional strategies for below grade level readers, emphasize the rationale for scripted lessons, and provide application and problem-solving exercises to promote effective responses to student questions in class. Minor revisions to the lessons include developing a PowerPoint presentation to provide visual material for students, as well as reorganizing instructional delivery or replacing writing activities and student resource sheets with group discussion. The revisions are designed to improve instruction. None of the minor revisions changes the content of the lessons approved by the Board of Education on January 9, 2007.

In the normal sequence of instruction, the revised lessons are the bridge between Standard 4, *Family Life and Human Sexuality* and Standard 7, *Disease Prevention and Control*. Due to the timing of the field test, the revised lessons were taught out of sequence. Therefore, many of the questions students submitted could be addressed during the normal course of instruction. For example, the questions about contraception and reproduction address information that typically is presented to students early in the Family Life and Human Sexuality unit. During a full implementation, students will receive this information before the revised lessons. Similarly, during full implementation, questions about STD/Sexually Transmitted Infections and HIV/AIDS will be answered immediately following the condom usage lesson, during the unit on Disease Prevention and Control, when the lessons are taught in the proper sequence. Answering questions about vocabulary words, such as the word epithet, will be addressed in professional development.

Other questions submitted were raised by only a few students and, in most cases, a single student raised a question. The questions also address material that is presented in the lessons and, if asked in class, could be answered by the teacher. Although the field-test training did address the types of questions that teachers can answer in class, it is clear in the teacher and student feedback that

teachers were still unsure about what questions they can and cannot answer during the lessons. As stated earlier, answering student questions will be emphasized during the required training for all Grade 8 and Grade 10 teachers this summer.

Recommended Resolution

WHEREAS, On January 9, 2007, the Board of Education unanimously approved field-testing revisions to the health education curriculum for students in Grade 8 and Grade 10 and directed the superintendent to inform the Board of the results of field testing the revised lessons and seek its approval at the appropriate time in preparation for systemwide implementation for the 2007–2008 school year; and

WHEREAS, During March 2007, field tests of the revised lessons were conducted in three middle schools and three high schools, and feedback from field-test administrators, teachers, students, and parents was collected and analyzed; and

WHEREAS, Feedback indicates professional development, communication, support, and the revised lessons provided to field-test administrators, teachers, and counselors resulted in effective instruction that met curricular outcomes for students; and

WHEREAS, Suggestions to improve manageability and/or clarity have been incorporated into lessons and professional development as appropriate and were consistent with the curricular outcomes; now therefore be it

Resolved, That the Board of Education approve the revised lessons to the Health Education curriculum and instructional materials on “Respect for Differences in Human Sexuality” in Grade 8 and Grade 10 and on “Condom Use Demonstration” in Grade 10, with minor instructional improvements, for full implementation beginning in the 2007–2008 school year.

At the table today is Ms. Betsy Brown, director, Department of Curriculum and Instruction.

JDW:EJL:kjm