

Cy-Fair ISD revises sex-education program after parent concerns

By Erin Mulvaney | October 15, 2012 | Updated: October 16, 2012 11:49am

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Concerns expressed by parents have prompted the Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District to revise its new "abstinence-plus" curriculum, shifting some material to students in higher grades.

Seventh-graders in Cy-Fair ISD, the state's third-largest district after Houston and Dallas, are scheduled to begin the "It's Your Game" sex-education curriculum at the end of October. But in response to complaints that too-young students were seeing explicit material, the district will push the final four lessons in the 12-lesson curriculum for seventh-graders to the eighth grade, according to a letter sent to parents by Superintendent **Mark Henry** last week.

Henry said lessons 9-12 will be taught with the eighth-grade program, which also includes 12 lessons, next year. This will enable a committee of staff and parents to evaluate the program developed by the **University of Texas Prevention Research Center** in Houston, he said.

In Cy-Fair, only students whose parents sign permission forms receive the instruction. The lessons combine class instruction and computer simulations that include interactive lessons and videos.

• **See letter from Cy-Fair ISD to parents**

Parents critical of the new program created a Facebook group in September, "Cy-Fair Parents Against Safer Sex-Ed for 7th & 8th Graders," which has drawn 458 "likes." Almost 500 parents signed an online petition asking the district to replace the current program.

The district's seventh-graders represent 8,500 families. During the October board meeting, district spokeswoman **Kelli Durham** said, six speakers out of 10 expressed concerns about the sex-education curriculum.

Some parents objected to seventh-graders being exposed to explicit descriptions of anal and oral sex, older actors in provocative situations and an interactive presentation that details different forms of contraception. The interactive cites "choosing to wait" as the most effective choice and "hope" as the least effective, and it includes details about protection against sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy.

"There's content in almost every single lesson that is objectionable," said **Christine Kalmbach**, a parent of a seventh-grade student, who started the online petition.

In materials distributed to parents, the district said it provided information about anal, oral and vaginal sex because all of these practices can cause STDs, and the state requires that it provide information about such risks. That lesson will remain in seventh-grade classes.

'Shame on us'

Kevin Brewer, a Cy-Fair parent of twin seventh-grade girls, said he signed the consent form before reviewing the material, which he found gratuitous and distastefully presented. He has since opted his children out of the class.

Brewer wants the district to eliminate the program. He said he objects to much of the material that will still be taught to seventh-graders, including descriptions of oral sex, references to alcohol and drug use and having the students act out scenarios.

"Shame on us ... for signing it (without) looking into it; we just assumed the school was going to be doing something that made sense," he said.

Brewer suggested opting out wouldn't protect his children from the material.

"I can't opt my kids out of the lunch room or the bus ride. I can't opt them out of the hallways," he said.

Surveys completed by middle school parents last February showed that 55 out of 60 who attended an information meeting felt comfortable with the curriculum, according to data from the district.

Public schools do not have to provide sex-education programs, but if they do, the Texas Education Code requires that they stress abstinence as the preferred choice for unmarried teens and devote more time to it than to other behaviors.

Cy-Fair is among 15 Texas school districts or charter schools that use UT's sex-education program, according to data collected by the district. **Most Texas school** districts teach abstinence-only programs.

Susan Tortolero, director of the UT program, said the more teens know about sex, the less likely they are to engage in it.

Tortolero said the district came to a good compromise with the critical parents by moving back the last few lessons. She said the program has not generated similar backlash to Cy-Fair ISD in any other districts using it.

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