

Minority Report of the Subcommittee on Sex Education (SSE) of the Student Health Advisory Council (SHAC)

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Introduction

I am presenting this report because our committee did not reach a consensus or a reasonable compromise regarding how to present sex education in Needham. In this report I present for consideration significant and well established views not taken into account in the report of our committee. I brought perspective to our committee work from my experience first as a father, second as a practicing psychiatrist in the community, and third as one who respects the wisdom of our forebears. In this report I have also frequently explained the discussions of these views in the committee, as I understood them. My explanations are based on notes that I took in the meetings as well as notes that I made shortly after the meetings. They are a sincere attempt to accurately render these discussions. Although I was asked by the chairperson of the Subcommittee on Sex Education and by the chairperson of the School Committee not to present a minority report, I respectfully disagree.

Throughout nearly two years of discussions, I have observed persistent and fundamental differences between, on the one hand, my views on sex, on sex education, and on the relation between the authority of parents and the authority of teachers, and, on the other hand, the apparent consensus on these matters held by the other members of the committee. This consensus was not perfect, but departures from it were infrequent and relatively minor in significance. Many members in this apparent consensus were not very vocal in their defense of that consensus.

We did not manage to resolve these differences in a spirit of cooperation through effective dialogue. Rather, we managed to be polite with each other and to avoid productive debate. The latest draft of our subcommittee report that I have seen was the one from April of 2010. The result of our committee work (both my sense of that result at the present time and the result as reported in the April 2010 draft) neglects to take into consideration many very important concepts that are part of longstanding tradition on human sexuality.

Furthermore, the process of our work contributed to a product that is not representative of a true consensus within the community. From the beginning, I was treated (respectfully) as an outsider. I was a parent representative allowed into the inner workings of the school. I was usually responding to material presented by the faculty. I was not encouraged to take the initiative, though I often did. When I did take the initiative, my proposals were often not dealt with at all. When they were dealt with, it was briefly and superficially, and then the discussion was moved on to another point.

There was no formal process for accepting or rejecting proposals. Material presented was never formally voted on. It was presented, there was superficial discussion, and then typically what was presented was apparently adopted, as evidenced by it reappearing in later meetings. This informal adoption was done without minutes about what was accepted or rejected and why.

There are a number of reasons that I feel obligated to represent my view to the parties requesting this study, who as I understand it are the superintendent and school committee:

1. If there were no “minority” report, there would be a misleading appearance of unanimity in the committee.
2. The working process of the past two years has neglected to deal with a number of highly relevant and controversial issues.
3. I represent the views of a significant group of parents that have not been properly taken into account.
4. I represent an alternative and more traditional view of our culture, and not just a personal view.

I affirm traditional views of human sexuality that should not be discarded lightly, because they have been developed over thousands of years of community experience and passed along for the benefit of future generations. We parents have not hired the faculty and administration of our schools to disregard or to deconstruct our culture, but rather to assist us in passing it on to our children. Social change occurs, but we have not hired our teachers or enlisted individuals on this committee to bring such change about. Even in the wider community, beyond the school, the burden should be on those who would disregard and deconstruct these classic understandings, not on those who would perpetuate and refine them. However, the deliberations of the sex education committee have effectively placed the burden of argument on those who hold a traditional view. In my professional work I repeatedly confront the sufferings caused by such disregard and deconstruction of culture. I therefore consider it my obligation to submit this “minority” report. If we neglect to teach the children of Needham traditional views on sexuality, we compromise their education, and that is precisely what will happen if the recommendations of the Subcommittee on Sex Education are implemented.

Accordingly, I would strongly recommend to the School Committee that this matter be sent back to the subcommittee for further study, or that the School Committee create some alternative mechanism to continue developing this curriculum.

Rights and Responsibilities of Parents

Parents understand that students give tremendous weight to the views of their teachers. Furthermore, students rightfully believe their teachers because their parents send them to their particular school and, by so doing, their parents implicitly approve of the teachings. Therefore, parents should be aware that their children will be strongly affected by the proposed sex education lessons. Because of this, parents have a duty to become informed about such powerful educational material, and the school has a duty to inform the parents of the material.

Parents should be aware that throughout the SSE Committees discussions there have been frequent references to the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS), to Planned Parenthood Federation of America (PPFOA), and to the commercially available Get Real sex education curriculum of the Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts (PPLM). The sex education curriculum proposal is sympathetic to these organizations. The philosophies of these organizations have been guiding lights to the committee’s discussions. Parents would be well advised to study these

organizations, their activities and educational programs, their philosophies, their supporters, and their attitudes and positions. A good place to start is on their respective websites.

It is also important for parents to understand the international context for sex education. Declarations of the rights of children are being made by powerful organizations around the world, without taking into account the right and responsibility of parents as the primary educators and caregivers for their children. Furthermore, implicit in some of these declarations is that the age of consent should be as low as ten years. Here is one example. The International Planned Parenthood Foundation's (IPPF) *Stand and Deliver* report of late 2009 makes clear that they are part of an international political movement that seeks to establish civil rights for children 10 years of age and older, including the rights to "sexual and reproductive health care," "confidentiality regarding sexual health services and care," "education about sexual rights, sexual orientation, sexuality, social relationships and gender identity," "privacy, which is essential to the exercise of sexual autonomy," etc. To learn about this from IPPF's own materials, parents should study the booklet entitled *Stand and Deliver: Sex, Health and Young People in the 21st Century*¹.

Communication with Parents

During our meetings, I advocated for frankly and thoroughly informing parents about the proposed lessons for sex education. I argued that such a policy of transparency would engender a process of dialogue in the community from which a consensus could emerge about what to teach.² I argued that the resulting discussion would produce a curriculum that would be less a lightning rod for controversy and would be stable and politically viable over time. In one committee meeting, the leadership of the committee insisted on a closed process (with the exception of formal presentations and discussions with the community at two junctures in the committee's work) so as to avoid unproductive controversy and misunderstanding. When I declined to keep the proposals under consideration quiet, it was suggested instead that I refrain from conversation outside the committee about *written materials* of the committee. When I declined, a special meeting³ was called by the leadership with me alone to deal with the issue of outside communications. During that meeting it was proposed that outside the committee I not talk about only *the draft of the committee's eventual report* to the School Committee. At that point I asked that the expectation of the leadership be clarified for the entire committee, although this intent for a closed process had been originally announced in a committee meeting. I believe that clarification was never made.

I also advocated for truly informing parents, frankly and thoroughly, about the contents of the curriculum each year that it is offered because this will provide them with the knowledge to make an informed decision about whether to allow their child to receive the lessons or to opt their child out of the curriculum. It is important to note here that this opt-out provision is a right of parents under Massachusetts law.⁴ Further benefits of transparency include that it will allow parents to make good decisions for their children freely and confidently and to know that their decisions are respected.

¹ <http://www.ippf.org/NR/rdonlyres/A478248A-374B-44D7-82D3-4A06AE354C9D/0/SexHealthYoungPeopleNow.pdf>

² SSE Meeting 1/13/10 and Meeting with Dr. Pinkham and Dr. Barr on 3/3/10

³ Meeting with Dr. Pinkham and Dr. Barr on 3/3/10

⁴ MGL Ch. 71, Sec. 32A

Parents fully aware of the content of the curriculum will be able to reinforce, challenge, or augment the curriculum at home, adding to the support of the child and exercising their right and responsibility as parents to educate their children. To further assure that the information parents are given about the curriculum is complete, I advocated that we develop clearly defined standards on what teachers should teach, quite detailed at a content level. I advocated that the lectures be written out in full and made easily available, preferably on the internet. I also recommend now that any distributed materials, images, multi-media presentations, etc. be available for easy display to parents. This way parents would know more certainly, accurately, and thoroughly what would be taught, and could therefore know better when to opt out or how to augment, support, or critique the school lesson at home.⁵ While the committee has consistently acknowledged the opt-out law and claimed that Needham will abide by it, I have not found any support from others in the committee for frank and thorough information being given to parents; in fact, arguments were made characterizing my recommendation that we do so as an attempt to “scare” the parents.⁶ There was sustained resistance to this level of transparency. The concern was raised that the teachers’ union would not approve of directing the teachers to that degree, although the person with that concern had no particular idea about how or why the union would object. The concern was also raised that such direction would be too stifling to the educational process. However, parents deserve transparency that facilitates open communication, and that treats them – at a minimum – as partners in the educational process. If the committee’s uncooperative attitude prevails, depriving parents of a thorough understanding of the sex education program, parents will be trapped in the role of ignorant and undesired outsiders in their children’s education. Even though the parental opt-out right might be superficially acknowledged and superficial notice of sex education given, parents would be effectively deprived of their opt-out right, and more importantly, of their right to participate in their children’s education.

After these discussions, it emerged in October 2010 that more detailed and thorough lesson plans than the outlines the committee was working with at the time would exist eventually. I suggested that we make those lesson plans available on-line for parents.⁷ Everyone else at that meeting disagreed.

Reasons not to make these lesson plans available included:

- 1) Teachers would lose the “surprise” element important in teaching, if a child had any idea what was coming in a lesson. I responded that these lesson plans could be displayed on the parents’ part of Powerschool so that students couldn’t see it. Then someone worried that the parents would show it to their child. I responded that the school could ask parents not to do that and explain why.
- 2) It was argued that it would result in parents objecting to some content and cause a problem.
- 3) It was argued that the content would be too sensitive to have on the web. If that were true then one would have to consider that it might be too sensitive to teach the students.
- 4) Another argument was that students’ foreknowledge about the curriculum content would reduce the effectiveness of teaching, making it more likely students would be resistant to whatever participation was expected of them.

These reasons are insufficient to deny parents their right to know what their children will be taught. Nevertheless, the resistance to transparency continued.

⁵ SSE Meeting 6/2/10

⁶ SSE Meeting 11/12/09

⁷ SSE Meeting 10/13/10

Yet another communication problem is found in the curriculum design. The current SSE Report draft⁸ says that “...sex will be integrated into the current curriculum so that topics can spiral throughout the entire [health] curriculum...” In the prior draft the language was to “...blend sex education into the current [health] curriculum... . All sexual decisions can be blended really intelligently into what we are already doing in other areas.”

I disagreed and argued that we should not integrate sexuality into the entire health curriculum. This approach would make it exceedingly difficult for parents to become informed and to opt in or opt out intelligently, since it would be very difficult to know what is being taught and when. Furthermore, opting out would mean losing out on some part of the rest of the curriculum with which sex education had been “blended.”⁹ It is not clear whether a parent could opt a child out of the entire health curriculum (not just the sex education part), but given how the curriculum is intended to be blended, leaving the health curriculum altogether would become the only reasonable and practical way for a parent to opt out of the sexuality segment. This plan to blend the sex education pieces into the rest of the health curriculum is not respectful of parental rights, and seems designed to intentionally foil the parents’ rights as the primary educators of their children.

It is clear that there remain unaddressed concerns about transparency, and also an evident disregard for parents as partners in the educational process. This played out in the committee as an absence of commitment by the school system to communicate cooperatively with parents regarding sex education.

Behavioral Norms

At several committee meetings, I advocated the teaching of sexual norms.¹⁰ My view on this important subject has been consistently and strenuously opposed. In one instance, one prominent member stated that we had agreed in the committee that there are no norms, not just that we should not teach any. No one in the meeting other than me took issue with that statement. Moreover, since then, I have not become aware of anyone on the committee who agrees we should teach norms, nor have I become aware of anyone who agrees with me that there are norms. (To be complete, there were moments where it was stated or implied by someone on the committee that sex should be consensual, and there was no disagreement on that. That would be one instance where there did seem to be consensus on a norm about sex, and this would imply that some on the committee do believe there are sexual norms. But this is relatively subtle.) I am not aware of any clear principle regarding the existence or substance of norms that the committee has deliberated upon and decided. Based on the behavior of the committee, one is tempted to conclude that the committee has decided there are no norms and the question about whether to teach norms is therefore moot. To further confuse matters, there are references to “cultural norm of delayed marriage and childbearing” and “socio-cultural influences on sexuality” in the latest draft of the committee’s report.¹¹ So it seems that norms are at least going to be referred to in the curriculum, though my understanding is that I am the only committee member who believes that there are norms. Even as a member of the committee that generated this report, I don’t know what the 12th grade

⁸ SSE Report, draft of 4/12/10, p.4

⁹ SSE Meeting 4/12/10

¹⁰ A number of SSE meetings and in the meeting on 3/3/10 with Dr. Kathy Pinkham and Dr. Connie Barr

¹¹ SSE Report, 4/12/10 draft, Grade 12, Essential Questions and Content B

curriculum will say about these matters. No one reading the report will know either. If the committee is taking the position that there are no norms governing sexual behavior, then the committee should say so in its report to the School Committee. If the committee's position is that there are norms but they won't be taught, it should say that in its report and explain why they won't be taught.

If sexual norms are indeed not taught by our public school system, the community must be made aware of the import of that absence. If the community in which a family is grounded does not effectively educate its young people in the human meaning of sex and sexual norms, that family is alone in teaching its children. In that case, any normative teaching about sexuality is seen by the child as peculiar to his or her mother and father. Sometimes even mother and father may be perceived to differ sharply. Under these conditions, the sense that there is meaning and there are norms becomes difficult for parents to impart and for children to believe. Because the school has such a profound influence on the formation of our children, and because the school generally offers students what they need to get along in the world, if the school offers nothing to its students regarding sexual meaning and norms, it is very likely that thoughtful children will conclude that there is no objective meaning and there are no social norms when it comes to sex. In this way, not teaching meaning and norms not only leaves families to fend for themselves, it also undermines those families that are trying to teach meaning and norms. Furthermore, the absence in a person of a sense of behavioral norms profoundly weakens the significance of law in that person's decisions. To such persons, law appears rather arbitrary, and the motivation to obey comes from fear of punishment, expectation of reward, or from some vague sense of wanting to be a part of a functioning society.

Whatever the School Committee and school administration ultimately decide on this general matter of meaning and norms, as well as on whether norms will be included in the particular content of sex education in Needham, the resulting principles must be clearly communicated to all of us parents. Only in this way will we know the philosophy of the school system, and what is being taught to our children in our schools. This understanding will enable us to educate our children in the ways we understand life, either cooperatively with or in opposition to the schools, and enable us to exercise our right and responsibility to direct our schools through our elected representatives on the School Committee.

The Meaning of Sex

Being human includes having a sense of meaning. For example, we wonder what someone meant when she said or did something. What was intended? What was felt? What was being communicated? Our response to her presupposes our sense of what she meant. This is private meaning held between persons in relationships. Some meaning is held by an entire community of persons in their culture. For example, in the United States, we have a shared sense of the meaning of having a constitutional self-governance. Most of us also have a sense that there is objective meaning, i.e. meaning that can be apprehended by all human persons regardless of their cultural differences.

Our sense of meaning has a large part in how our behavior is motivated. How students understand the meaning of sex will shape their motivation for sexual behavior. Generally speaking, the more narrowly defined the meaning of the sexual behavior, the more refined and limited the behavior will be. For example, if one sees it merely in terms of pleasure and pain, she will behave sexually in ways that she

believes will maximize pleasure and minimize pain. Of course her insight about the pleasurable (good) or painful (bad) consequences of sexual activity may be quite limited, resulting in significant misjudgments. If she is also a person who knows how to love the other person in the relationship, she might be motivated to behave in ways that maximize the pleasure and minimize the pain of the other person. If she sees sexual behavior as communication, she will be motivated to communicate with her behavior what she truly means and to avoid miscommunication. If she sees sex as a mutual expression of loving commitment, then sex for her will be limited to such loving and committed relationships. If she sees sex as a mutual expression of lifelong loving commitment, then sex will be limited to such a relationship. If she sees sex as a mutual expression of total and lifelong loving commitment then sex will be limited to marriage. If she sees sex as reproductive or procreative, then she will have sex only with a husband and be accepting of children. As can be seen from these examples, as the meaning of sex becomes specified to a higher degree, the relationships in which sex is a good activity become more and more specified. Notice that the behavior is guided by positive principles, and any restrictions are to support the positive meaning of sexual expression.

In the interest of casting sex in a positive light with positive meaning, I advocated in the committee that the first image of sex in the curriculum be that it is the way a man and a woman try to have a baby and begin a family.¹² This is a most natural way to begin, and it would cast sex in a positive light, as a human expression that is at the heart of the future of humanity and at the heart of the family. Respect for sexual behavior would be engendered by such an introductory image, and this sense that sex is special would make it undesirable to engage in premature or promiscuous sex, a goal the committee seems to agree on. In this way, risks would be reduced without the student even needing to consider risks. Later, after such a positive meaning is established, lessons about the risks of premature or promiscuous sex could be given, and these would add to the motivation to refrain from premature or promiscuous sex. This proposal was strongly rejected by some on the committee while all others remained silent. There were a number of reasons cited against this approach. The first was that there are other ways to have babies, like in vitro fertilization, and that therefore we should not teach that sex is how a man and woman have a baby. However, while other methods of reproduction now exist, they are secondary and supplemental to nature. For the sake of furthering discussion, I allowed that one could say both that sexual intercourse is how a man and woman have a baby and that IVF is another technological method; but, that suggestion was not accepted. Another reason cited against my proposal was that saying that sex is how a man and woman have children would be a “value,” and therefore it should not be taught. My counterclaim that this was a matter of fact and not a value did not appear to be acknowledged or persuasive. While other purposes of sexual behavior exist, this scientific fact is essential to continued human existence. What is wrong with presenting the elemental association between sexual behavior and reproduction? In this argument against my position one can again see this idea that there are no norms or at least that norms should not be taught, even though in this case I was not proposing that a norm exists or that a norm be taught. A third reason given was that this is not how a lot of the students think and that therefore the school would be ill-advised to put it this way. That reason seemed completely at odds with any educational philosophy I have ever encountered. A fourth reason for not teaching it was that it was “the elephant in the room” that men and women have sex with each other, a rationale I was very perplexed to hear. I asked if in science the school teaches that animals have babies through sex and one member argued that that was irrelevant because we are not animals. Thus, my proposal to introduce

¹² SSE Meeting 1/13/10 and 6/2/10, and Meeting on 3/3/10 with Dr. Kathy Pinkham and Dr. Connie Barr

the topic of human sexuality by teaching that it is the basis of generation and family formation was simply rejected, though without any vote and, to my knowledge, without any record of this disagreement.

Other ideas on how to cast sex in a positive light that have not been discussed yet include to associate the topic of sex with pictures of babies, to teach the wonders of embryology in a basic and introductory way, and to associate the topic of sex with the topic of love in the sense of the willingness to suffer for the sake of the good of the loved one. Such an idea of love is of obvious importance for family life. I don't recall that love is ever defined in the curriculum, and there has been very little if any mention of it in our discussions.

The curriculum of recent years introduces sex in the context of a lesson on avoiding AIDS, presented in the HIV/AIDS unit in Grade 6. That does not put sex in a positive light. The next time sex is dealt with in the current curriculum is not until 5 years later, in the 11th grade.

In the current SSE proposal,¹³ sex is definitely not cast in a positive light reflecting its primary and essential biological and social functions. To be specific, pregnancy is always or nearly always spoken of as a "risk" of sexual activity, and is also often associated with sexually transmitted diseases.¹⁴ Sexually transmitted diseases are bad things, yet the proposed approach likens STDs and pregnancy. Characterizing pregnancy primarily as a "risk" and associating pregnancy with STDs is problematic because it creates the perception of pregnancy as intrinsically bad. Furthermore, perceiving pregnancy as a risk causes it to be seen as incidental to sexual behavior rather than essential to it. If pregnancy is thought of as a bad outcome of sexual intercourse or as incidental to it, then there will be less motivation to ground sex in a social context such as marriage.

Rather than this very negative approach, we should be first characterizing pregnancy as a good thing and as a fruition of sexual intercourse, not something incidental or bad. A prudent man and woman with this attitude will value sexual relations very highly and therefore be motivated to refrain from sexual activity until they are married and can enjoy a social context in which pregnancy, birth, and child rearing can be treasured fully. Notice how teaching this attitude reduces risk without any reference to bad things or "risks." Later in the curriculum, after sex is established as a wonderful thing, difficulties such as STDs, unwanted pregnancy, premature or irresponsible sexual relations, etc. can be discussed.

The Meaning of Menarche

Speaking scientifically, menarche is the beginning of menstrual bleeding in a young woman's life. This flow consists of the uterine tissue that would have received the embryo at implantation. The topic of menarche is proposed to be taught in the fifth grade. I suggested that we teach that menarche is a sign that a young girl is becoming able to be a mother someday.¹⁵ This idea was resisted very strenuously.

¹³ In the SSE Report, draft of 4/12/10, Grade 12, Essential Questions, there is the vague question: "What does the cultural norm of delayed marriage and childbearing mean for sexuality and relationships?" I don't know what this means and it should be more fully articulated.

¹⁴ See MA Curriculum Frameworks standard 4.18 as an example, cited in both 11th and 12th grade curricula in SSE Report, draft of 4/12/10

¹⁵ SSE Meeting 11/12/09

The initial reaction was simply that this should not be taught. When I asked why, the reason given was that we had decided to teach only facts. I pointed out that this is a fact. Then another member of the committee argued that we should not teach this because not all girls will want to be mothers. These are not good reasons to oppose teaching the meaning of menarche. No one gave a rationale for presenting the fact of menstrual bleeding without a meaningful context.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Single-Sex vs. Mixed-Sex Student Groups

One member of the committee argued the point that having men teach 5th grade girls about menstruation is not a good idea, especially if they are not physicians or nurses, and also that the girls should be taught about this topic in an all-girl group. I supported her view during those discussions. The unintended effect of having this topic taught by a male in the presence of males would be to undermine the development of modesty by having such young girls engaged with a male stranger in reflecting on such an intimate topic in the presence of their male classmates. Moreover, the lesson will be better learned in an all-female group, without the interior distraction caused by the presence of males. In an all-girl group the girls will ask questions more freely on this topic than they would in a mixed group. I believe that the main opposing argument was that it would cost too much. It was also argued that there is value in challenging the kids and not leaving them in their comfort zone too much. My sense was that this proposal for changing class composition when menarche is taught did not meet with strong resistance in principle, but those of us arguing for this change did not prevail and the topic will continue to be taught in a mixed group.

The effects of teaching single-sex vs. mixed-sex groups should be better evaluated so that it can be taken into account in developing the sex education curriculum. This is important to do now, even if the best ideas cannot be implemented immediately. For the program to have goals about this, to be realized over time, would be advisable. The nature of the topic of instruction or discussion is relevant to which arrangement is better. The age of the students would be another relevant factor. Values to be promoted by the best arrangement for any given lesson would include the development of modesty, privacy, dignity, and propriety in the students. Finally, the arrangement that is best pedagogically in any given instance should be considered. A mixed group might facilitate certain discussions, whereas a single-sex group might facilitate others.

“Abstinence-only” vs. “Comprehensive” Sex Education

The SSE report¹⁶ divides sex education programs into two categories: “abstinence-only” vs. “comprehensive.” “Abstinence only” does not do justice to the philosophy of traditional sexual mores, and is misleading because the “only” in “abstinence-only” makes it sound like a minimalist approach. This terminology is adequate only from a very limited risk management perspective, and subtly reduces the traditional meaning of sexuality and traditional sexuality education to a proscriptive attitude and a minimalist approach. The word “abstinence” is used in a context of methods of contraception and STD prevention (the very limited risk management perspective). The “abstinence” in this terminology

¹⁶ SSE Report, draft of 4/12/10, p. 4

focuses attention on what is not to be done (proscriptive), rather than on the wonderful thing that is communicated and accomplished during sexual relations when that form of communication between man and woman is protected by restricting it to relationships of total love and commitment. On the other hand, “comprehensive” sounds good, but the term belies the import of that approach to sex education. The thrust of this approach is a negation. Comprehensive sex education negates the commonly understood meaning of human sexuality in the western world. It claims, implicitly, that there is no objective meaning of human sexuality. It does this by validating all subjective meanings, as well as the notion that there is no meaning. It teaches the student to consider what sex means to him subjectively, if it means anything at all, and then to live by that meaning. Such an approach should clearly and forthrightly proclaim, at a minimum, that it actively and explicitly denies the validity of western culture’s longstanding, classic view of sexuality. During discussions in committee (see the section above on the meaning of sex), some members came close to such a denial, but the denial was passive and implicit, and came as a refusal to teach the classic meaning. It will be important to note what if anything is stated about this matter in the committee’s final report to the School Committee. There will probably not be an explicit statement of the underlying approach to the meaning of sex nor even a reference to a decision not to teach the classic meaning. That the classic meaning will not be taught will profoundly limit the perceptual and conceptual horizon of students and deeply undermine any parent’s or other social group’s attempt to impart the classic meaning. Even if the classic meaning were taught only as one of a number of equally acceptable alternatives this would still be true. The choice is between an objective and classic meaning appreciated by a community of persons and an assorted disarray of subjective meanings or no meaning. In summary, “abstinence-only” and “comprehensive” do not describe this choice, and this language is misleading.

Within this context, I present a number of areas of concern regarding the discussion in committee on what school of sex education to adopt.

To begin, there seems to be a serious methodological problem with the parent focus groups that were held, regarding the quality of information obtained relevant to this question of the type of sex education that should be delivered in Needham.¹⁷ The 4/12/10 draft of the SSE Report states that in the focus groups parents were given definitions for “two common philosophies of sex education:” Abstinence-Only Education and Abstinence-Plus Education. The definition given for Abstinence-Only Education is “teaching that one should refrain from having sex until one is married. (does not include any education about contraceptives).” The definition given for Abstinence-Plus Education is “teaching that one should refrain from having sex until one is married - also includes education about contraceptives.” The idea here seems to be that these were the types of education presented to the parents for their consideration. Note that the difference between the two is only with regard to whether or not contraceptive technology is taught. Significantly, Abstinence-Plus Education as defined to the parent focus groups is not what the committee has been planning. Evidently the sex education committee does not believe that people “should” refrain from having sex until they are married. I have been trying to raise precisely that question for discussion and therefore would have noticed any suggestion that anyone believed that sex should occur only in the context of marriage. I have seen no evidence in the committee deliberations that such a normative lesson would be supported by this committee. If there are persons on the committee who do believe sex outside marriage “should not happen,” or “is unhealthy,” or “is wrong,”

¹⁷ SSE Report, draft of 4/12/10, Appendix C, Focus Group Process

they should speak up. Though the committee has no intention of teaching that there should be no sex before marriage, it appears the parent focus groups may have understood that it had been decided to teach this norm, because both philosophies of sex education presented to the parents share in common that “one should refrain from having sex until one is married.” Given the attitude of the committee, it is likely that parents were seriously misled here. It is also concerning that one of the conclusions drawn from the parent focus groups in the 4/12/10 draft of the SSE Report is that “the focus group participants voiced strong support for a comprehensive sex education curriculum.” According to the information in the draft of the SSE Report, it would appear that “Comprehensive Sex Education” was not defined for parents in these focus groups, and yet the report draws a conclusion about the parents’ support of comprehensive sex education. Moreover, comprehensive sex education curricula typically do not teach that one should refrain from sex until married. They are not equivalent to programs that fit the definition of Abstinence-Plus Sex Education as given to the parents. Therefore, if the authors of the draft are using the terms “Abstinence-Plus Sex Education” and “Comprehensive Sex Education” synonymously they are using a false equation. If the conclusion that comprehensive sex education is strongly supported by Needham parents is based on such a false equation of terms, then the conclusion is clearly misleading. If a third “philosophy” was defined in the parent focus groups, i.e. Comprehensive Sex Education, and it was strongly supported over the other two, then of course the report needs to say that three philosophies were defined, not two, as well as how the third was defined. This methodological and terminological confusion must be resolved.

The 4/12/10 draft of the SSE report says that “we strongly recommend that the Needham Public Schools commit to a comprehensive sex education program,”¹⁸ without sufficient positive definition of what that entails, and without having adequately studied and discussed the debate in the literature about this matter. As just one example, I note that in the committee¹⁹ I referred to a minority report from the CDC study group on sex education called CDC Community Guide Adolescent Sex Behavior Coordination Team External Partners Consultant Panel. It argues that the CDC recommendations that favor the comprehensive risk reduction (CRR) strategy over abstinence education (AE) are not well founded.²⁰ This issue was not taken up in our discussion. In general, the tremendous controversy that exists in the literature was not discussed sufficiently at all.

I note also that this draft of the SSE report²¹ describes this debate as political, which of course it is. However, the debate is also rational and socially functional, and emanates from fields such as psychology, public health, epidemiology, sociology, law, moral philosophy,²² and moral theology.²³ This draft of the SSE report suggests that moral conflict over how to teach sex education may lead to less effective education. On the contrary, such “conflict,” through constructive dialogue, could actually lead

¹⁸ SSE Report, draft of 4/12/10, p. 4

¹⁹ Meeting on 3/3/10 with Dr. Kathy Pinkham and Dr. Connie Barr

²⁰ Irene Ericksen, M.S. and Danielle Ruedt, M.P.H., “A Minority Report: Fundamental Concerns About the CDC Meta-analysis of Group-based Interventions to Prevent Adolescent Pregnancy, HIV, and Other STIs,” Nov. 7, 2009, available at [http://instituteresearch.com/docs/Minority_Report_CDC_Meta-Analysis_\(11-18-09\).pdf](http://instituteresearch.com/docs/Minority_Report_CDC_Meta-Analysis_(11-18-09).pdf)

²¹ SSE Report, draft of 4/12/10, p. 4

²² By use of the word “moral” in this report, I mean that quality a behavior has because it promotes goodness. “Goodness” here includes things like bodily health, mental health, spiritual health, thriving, family and community well-being, etc. This meaning is in accord with notions of “natural law.”

²³ For those who believe in God, “goodness” would also denote the quality of those behaviors that cooperate in God’s plan, in this case in a plan that involves the relation and cooperation between man and woman. This idea is consistent with all the monotheistic religions.

to a curriculum that better represents the community consensus and better directs our children in how to lead socially responsible and healthy lives.

Parents in the focus groups of May and June of 2009 appear to have been given the impression that students will be taught that they should abstain from sex until marriage. However, this is not true. In the proposed curriculum “abstinence” is presented as just one of many options.²⁴ It is not presented as the right option. Nor is a strong and complete rationale for abstinence from sexual relations outside of marriage provided. (A functional and available rationale is provided above in the section on the meaning of sex.) Furthermore, sex is discussed in a context of subjective social or moral values or in a context of no values. Most students will come away with the sense that there is no values-based wisdom about sex, because the very people whom their parents have selected to teach them about sex have little to say on that topic.

Finally, the committee proposes that abstinence be taught in a way that is both disturbing and confusing. Attached to this document is a copy of a proposed exercise in the section on abstinence in Grade 8. I vigorously opposed this lesson. In it sexual behaviors are arranged in order from less to more intense. At the beginning is “holding hands” and at the end is “anal sex.” The child is asked to check one of two boxes after each behavior: designating either “abstinent” or “non-abstinent.” The behavior at the point where the child crosses over to checking the “abstinent” box is the cutoff beyond which the child will not go to be faithful to his intention to abstain. So, for example, one child could leave this 8th grade lesson thinking she was going to be “abstinent” by never touching someone else’s genitalia or having hers touched, and another could leave thinking she would be abstinent by restricting herself to vaginal intercourse and avoiding anal penetration. This exercise suggests that the behavioral boundaries in the choice for “abstinence” are arbitrary. It suggests that the faculty has no guidance to offer about what “abstinence” means, even in purely somatic behavioral terms. That anal sex is brought into a lesson on abstinence is totally unnecessary and the motive to do so must be understood. To my knowledge, I was the only member of the committee who had a problem with this particular exercise. I argued that the rationale for what is to be abstained from and why it is to be abstained from should be asserted by the teacher and not left to the imagination of the student, and that the argument for abstinence from premarital and extramarital sex as the best way to live should be objectively presented.²⁵

One of the common arguments made against teaching abstinence is that young people are incapable of valuing it and executing it. This argument seriously underestimates the capacities of our children. The fact that human beings are capable of abstinence and the fact that there are many serious problems that result from sex outside marriage should lead us to the conclusion that we must teach abstinence as strongly as possible.

Reducing the incidence of extramarital and premarital sex (abstinence) will directly reduce the following problems:

1. Unwed and early pregnancy
2. Illegitimacy
3. Marriage prompted by pregnancy

²⁴ For example, see MA Curriculum Frameworks standard 4.13, in SSE Report, 4/12/10 draft, Grade 9

²⁵ A number of SSE meetings and in the meeting on 3/3/10 with Dr. Kathy Pinkham and Dr. Connie Barr

4. Single-parent families
5. Abortion
6. Mental and physical health hazards of abortion
7. Contraception (a problem because many methods of contraception entail health risks)
8. Reduced fertility due to prior abortion
9. Reduced educational opportunity (especially for girls, regardless of whether they carry the pregnancy to term, raise their child, give their child up for adoption, or have an abortion)
10. Disrespect of men for women and of women for men
11. Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)
12. Infertility caused by STDs
13. Marital infidelity
14. Divorce
15. Broken families

Regarding problems #11 and #12, theoretical considerations are very instructive. Sex outside marriage is a social behavior which constitutes a necessary precondition to allow STDs to be propagated. Perfect sexual abstinence outside marriage would result in the eradication of STDs over just a couple of generations. On a more pragmatic note, the later first sexual activity starts the fewer lifetime partners a person has, and the fewer partners one has the lower the likelihood of contracting an STD.²⁶

Bearing these issues in mind makes teaching abstinence as a moral obligation entirely defensible from a pragmatic point of view. It is an obligation of government is to promote and protect the common good. Abstinence clearly promotes the common good by reducing the risks listed above. Therefore, it is an obligation of government schools to teach abstinence.

Regarding problem #13, sex outside marriage is a social behavior that impedes the development of character strengths necessary for successful marriage and family life. Sexual continence builds character strengths that enable a husband and wife to be faithful to each other, and to be patient in marriage when sexual relations are not desirable to or not possible for one of the spouses. Sexual license suggests sex outside marriage has meaning and legitimacy, and makes it very difficult to maintain that there should be no sex outside marriage later, setting up the idea that sex with one's spouse has one meaning and sex with someone else has another meaning, and the two can coexist.

In our committee meetings it was often said that teaching abstinence is ineffective. This is a highly controversial claim.²⁷ Studies attempting to measure the effects of teaching abstinence are being done in a wider culture that strongly promotes premarital and extramarital sex. This prevailing culture surely diminishes the effect of any attempt to teach the value of abstinence, reducing any measurable benefits of abstinence curricula. Studies showing the effectiveness of teaching abstinence are not the only rationale for teaching abstinence. Abstinence itself by definition leads to good outcomes and the outright elimination of many of our social problems. Sexual continence outside marriage maintains an understanding of human sexuality, such as that it is biologically for reproduction, philosophically for

²⁶ R. Rector, K. Johnson, L. Noyes, and S. Martin, "The harmful effects of early sexual activity and multiple sexual partners among women: A book of charts," Washington, D.C.: The Heritage Foundation, 2003, cited in Meeker, *Strong Fathers, Strong Daughters*, Ch. 5

²⁷ For a review of studies of abstinence see Christine C. Kim and Robert Rector's "Evidence on the Effectiveness of Abstinence Education: An Update in Backgrounder of 2/19/2010, Heritage Foundation at http://thf_media.s3.amazonaws.com/2010/pdf/bg2372.pdf.

generation and family formation, and theologically for procreation. For these reasons, parents have a responsibility to promote abstinence, and so do the delegates of the parents in the public schools. Parents, teachers, and school administrators should be leaders, aiming to mold young men and women of integrity and sound moral character, rather than giving in to the prevailing culture. There is an issue of right and wrong here, and not just one of effectiveness. We parents must not stop teaching what we know to be right just because it is claimed by some that it will be ineffective to teach abstinence. Indeed, the argument that we should give up because it is predicted to be ineffective is a false argument. The truth is that we must find a way to make abstinence education effective.

The Bodily Risks of Extramarital Sex

Once the meaning of sex is taught in a positive light, the behavior of students will tend in a healthy direction. For those not so positively motivated at any given time, knowing the hazards of indiscriminate sexual behavior will motivate them to behave in healthy ways.

I advocated teaching that there would be no STDs if there were no sex outside wedlock, as part of helping the students realize how sexual mores affect risk. I also advocated teaching the cold hard facts about the nature and prevalence of STDs in the American high school population so that the students have a realistic sense of the natural outcome of sexual license and the likelihood of contracting an STD.²⁸ These ideas were not contradicted, argued against, or adopted. At another time I suggested that we drop the term “safe sex” because it implies that through technical or behavioral means you can render dangerous behavior “safe.”²⁹ “Safe sex” is not an accurate or useful term, especially in addressing adolescents who are generally less aware of risk than more mature people. Saying there are ways to make promiscuous sex “safe” will be likely to be misunderstood by a teenager. It appeared that this suggestion was not accepted.

As we teach about risk, we need to be sure that we provide a true sense of the hazards, and not understate them. I do not recall what facts the committee has decided to teach about bodily risks of sex, and my general impression is that we did not address this enough. I think this needs to be further studied and developed. I would recommend that the curriculum include the following facts found in Strong Fathers, Strong Daughters (Ballantine Books, 2006) by Dr. Meg Meeker, a pediatrician:

1. In the 1960s syphilis and gonorrhea were the main STDs, whereas after the sexual behavior of the past 40 years we now have approximately 25 different STDs.³⁰
2. Chlamydia became prevalent in the 1970s.³¹ It can cause infertility. 70 - 80% of patients don't know they are infected, and transmit the infection unknowingly.³²
3. HIV/AIDS arose in the 1980s.

²⁸ SSE Meeting, 6/2/10

²⁹ SSE meeting of 1/13/10

³⁰ Meg Meeker, M.D., *Strong Fathers, Strong Daughters*, Ballantine Books, 2006, p. 100.

³¹ Meeker, *Strong Fathers*, p. 100.

³² Meeker, *Strong Fathers*, p. 110.

4. Herpes simplex type 2 (HS2) became much more prevalent in the 1980s.³³ HS2 grew 500% in the 1980's. 70 - 80% of people with this disease don't know they have it, and transmit it unknowingly.³⁴ At current rates of expansion, it is estimated that by 2025 39% of men and 49% of women will have genital herpes.³⁵ Pregnant women can transmit it to their baby, causing brain disease in the baby.
5. In 1990 human papilloma virus (HPV) became prevalent as an STD. This disease is usually asymptomatic. HPV causes 95 - 99% of all cervical cancer.³⁶ There are many strains. Only the wart-causing strains cause symptoms. The 12 strains that cause cervical cancer do not cause warts and are asymptomatic. Girls who will eventually get cervical cancer from HPV won't even know they have HPV unless they are tested for it (e.g. if they also have a symptomatic HPV strain.) Girls who take an oral contraceptive for more than five years are four times more likely to get cervical cancer than girls who do not, probably due to increased number of sexual partners and poor condom use. Since transmission is skin-to-skin, even proper condom use won't completely prevent transmission of the disease. There are 5 - 6 million new cases annually.
6. 46.7 % of teens become sexually active before high school graduation.
7. 25% of sexually active teens have an STD at any one time.³⁷
8. Teens contract 25% of the new STDs.³⁸
9. 40.9% of girls age 14 - 17 say they have experienced unwanted sex.
10. Studies show teenage out-of-wedlock sex leads to depression, and that the depression is not simply associated with the sexual behavior, but caused by it.³⁹ Furthermore, depression results in reduced self-esteem and further sexual activity, setting up a vicious loop.

When students are told explicitly about the pleasures of sex and the varieties of "sexual" experience, when it is implied that sex outside marriage is a legitimate alternative value, and when it is suggested that sex can be safe and extramarital, or safe and serially "monogamous," or safe and polyamorous, or safe and homosexual, etc., we perpetuate the grim conditions that now prevail.

Condom use does not necessarily lower the risk of STDs, and can increase the risk. This is true especially for those diseases that are transmitted skin to skin, skin the condom does not cover. Risk can also be increased for those STDs that are transmitted via bodily fluids because condoms break and come off. For other reasons condom use can increase risk. For example, I raised the phenomenon of "risk compensation," which occurs when a safety precaution changes behavior in a way that offsets any reduced risk due to the precaution itself.⁴⁰ So, for example, if one typically uses a condom, that fact can lead to changes in behavior such as having more sexual partners or being less careful in partner selection, and that change increases risk of infection while the condom use is diminishing it, and these two effects run counter to each other, either reducing the benefit of the condom use or even making

³³ D.T. Fleming, et al., "Herpes Simplex Virus Type 2 in the United States, 1976 to 1994," *New England Journal of Medicine* 337 (1997): 1105-60, cited by Meeker, *Strong Fathers*, p. 100.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ D.N. Fisman, M. Lipsich, E.W. Hook, III, and S.J. Goldie, "Projection of the Future Dimensions and Costs of the Genital Herpes Simplex Type 2 Epidemic in the United States," *Sexually Transmitted Diseases*, October 2002, 29 (10): 608-22, cited by Meeker.

³⁶ Walboomers et al., "Human Papillomavirus Is a Necessary Cause of Invasive Cervical Cancer Worldwide," cited by Meeker.

³⁷ National Center for HIV, STD, and TB Prevention, "Tracking the Hidden Epidemics," cited by Meeker, *Strong Fathers*, p. 106.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, cited by Meeker, *Strong Fathers*, p. 106.

³⁹ Denise D. Hallfors, et al., "Which Comes First in Adolescence: Sex and Drugs or Depression?" *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 29 (2005): 3, cited by Meeker, *Strong Fathers*, p. 111.

⁴⁰ Meeting with Dr. Kathy Pinkham and Dr. Connie Barr on 3/3/10.

condom use deleterious. Edward C. Green, a senior research scientist at the Harvard School of Public Health, explains how risk compensation affects condom effectiveness in AIDS prevention in Africa.⁴¹

To sum up, extramarital sex is not safe. The risks are high and very serious. Whether various methods of risk reduction are effective is complicated.

Other Selected Topics

Sexual Assault

I suggested that we teach the fact about the fraction of girls (estimated at 40%) who experience unwanted sexual contact by the age of 17, partly to impress upon the students the relevance of the lessons on refusal skills.⁴² No one agreed, and most if not all disagreed. The main arguments I heard against this were, first, that students don't really learn about risk very well and, second, that it would not be good to single out sexual risk when there are many other risks including alcohol use, driving, etc. These reasons were inconsistent with the overall attitude of committee members, because the committee membership generally does want to reduce risk and teach students risk reduction techniques. It remains the case, however, that teaching this particular fact has been ruled out.

Resources for The Treatment of Reproductive Health Problems

I asked what "resources" for the treatment of reproductive health problems are included in the curriculum, and particularly in grade 9 since this topic is listed in the curriculum for grade 9 in the 4/12/10 draft of the SSE Committee report.^{43 44} I still do not know the answer. We should be very specific here. What health problems will be covered, what resources will be covered, and precisely what will be taught? To illustrate, pelvic inflammatory disease is a reproductive health problem. Fertility and pregnancy are not reproductive health problems. Pregnancy happens when a man and a woman are healthy, not ill. Generally speaking, contraception and abortion are therefore not resources for health problems. But, it is my impression that generally in this curriculum and in the comprehensive sex education world, when fertility and pregnancy are considered, they are considered in the context of reproductive health "problems," and contraception and abortion are considered "resources" for health problems. If fertility and pregnancy are considered in the context of reproductive health problems in our health curriculum, and if contraception and abortion are classified in our health curriculum as health care resources, we will be giving the students a very perverse view of health, illness, and medicine. It is unacceptable that these questions remain unanswered.

Contraception

What will be taught regarding contraception is very unclear. My impression is that contraception will be presented in a morally neutral way, and that at least by implication contraception will be presented as morally good. Any attempt to teach about contraception should include respectful and emphatic reference to the fact that traditionally contraception has been seen as immoral in our culture (though that has been gradually changing in the past century) and even illegal in many American jurisdictions until

⁴¹ Edward C. Green, Harvard School of Public Health, The Pope May Be Right, The Washington Post, 3/29/09

⁴² SSE Meeting 10/13/10

⁴³ SSE Meeting 4/12/10

⁴⁴ SSE Report, draft 4/12/10, Grade 9, Framework standard 4.20 and Activities/Strategies section D: Birth Control

the mid-20th century⁴⁵, and the rationale for those convictions and laws should be fairly explained. Otherwise, the school is delving into a morally sensitive area and then failing to educate. The school is to educate in the culture, not neglect the culture. By analogy, even if most of the faculty did not believe in the principles of the Constitution, we parents would still expect them to teach about those principles. If the faculty is going to insist on taking a morally neutral stance on contraception, then the parents need to be clearly informed of this fact.

The plan is for students to teach their parents about contemporary birth control. I think it is unwise to be suggesting to students that they know more about this topic than their parents, even if they might be learning some new technology (e.g., the existence of a new molecular delivery system).⁴⁶

The fact that oral contraceptives and “morning-after pills” are abortifacients and whether that fact will be taught or obscured has not been discussed.

Abortion

On at least three occasions, I asked for clarification about what will be taught regarding abortion and no one knew.⁴⁷ My understanding in the 6/2/10 meeting was that what would be taught about abortion would be discovered, or it would be found that it would not be taught, or it would be determined by whomever is to determine it, and that that answer would include whether how to obtain an abortion without parental knowledge will be taught (see Frameworks standards 4.a and 4.b). At our last meeting on 10/13/10 the answer was that we still don’t know. I have gotten the impression it has already been decided that the school will not teach about access to abortion through a judge without parental consent or knowledge, but that really hasn’t been clearly stated and I am not aware of it being in writing anywhere. This is an example of something about which there should probably be a school committee policy.

If abortion is taught, the question remains as to what will be taught. For example, will basic human embryology be taught so that the student will have a basic understanding of the level of development of the baby at various stages of pregnancy, and the techniques required to kill that baby at the various stages of pregnancy? Will it be taught that “abortion” is the killing of a baby at some stage of development, be it embryonic or fetal? Will it be taught that in the last 6 months of pregnancy abortion often, and probably usually, involves the dismemberment of the baby while it is alive in the womb? Will it be taught that the current state of law in the U.S. based on *Roe v. Wade* is that a woman can have her baby killed using any of these means for any reason whatsoever in the first six months of pregnancy, and that she can have the baby killed in the last trimester of pregnancy if the abortionist claims that not doing the abortion will likely adversely affect the physical or mental health of the woman? If these facts will be taught, parents must be clearly told that this is being taught. If they will not be taught, parents must know that too, because then children will be being given the impression that abortion is a fine reproductive health service and a reproductive health right, without knowing what abortion really is. Some parents will not want their child to be taught about abortion as a “reproductive health service” with these basic and essential facts obscured. Some parents will want their child taught about abortion without these facts being revealed. Some parents will not want abortion taught at all. Revealing

⁴⁵ *Griswold v. Connecticut*, 381 U.S. 479, (1965).

⁴⁶ SSE Report draft 4/12/10, Grade 9, Activities/Strategies E

⁴⁷ SSE meetings on 11/12/09, 6/2/10, and 10/13/10.

truthfully the full extent of what will be taught regarding abortion, with clarity, is essential to the right of the parents to educate their children and the right of the parents to opt out of the curriculum in whole or in part. This is both a moral and a legal issue for the school system.

The fact that oral contraceptives and “morning-after pills” are abortifacients and whether that fact will be taught or obscured has not been discussed.

Anal Sex

In the SSE Report draft of 1/20/10 these terms are included as “terms that students are expected to understand and use within the context of the unit” in the 9th grade: anus, anal intercourse.⁴⁸ I asked why “anus” and “anal intercourse” are listed here.⁴⁹ I note also that anal sex is to be raised in discussions on abstinence in Grade 8, with the implication in that exercise that one could be abstinent by refraining from anal sex but engaging in vaginal intercourse. This lesson is described fully in the section above on abstinence-only and comprehensive sex education. The 4/12/10 draft of the SSE Report, in describing the Parent Focus Groups that were conducted, includes in the definition of “sex” the practice of anal sex “...that causes physical and emotional arousal.”⁵⁰

I have raised serious physiological and linguistic problems with including anal sex in the sex education curriculum as a form of sexual activity. I have pointed out in our meetings that the anus is part of the gastrointestinal system, not the reproductive system, raising a clear need to think about what would motivate us to include this in our curriculum as though anal sex is sex, and raising a need to consider the implications of doing so. I have also recommended that we not use “intercourse” in connection with “anal.” If we must teach this, I suggested we use “anal sex,” although even that is an oxymoron, since “sex” really refers to reproduction and the reproductive system. The correct category for such human behavior is “sodomy.” The suggestion, by language such as “anal sex” or “anal intercourse,” that this behavior is “sexual” and in the same category as marital coitus is offensive and misleading. I pointed out that this behavior has medically dangerous consequences such as fecal incontinence, septicemia, AIDS, hepatitis B or C, etc. However, there has been no discussion of my concerns and objections.

The result of such a perversion of language and the result of placing anal sex in a context of sexual expressions such as the kiss or coitus is to normalize anal penetration or stimulation and to characterize it as normal sexual expression. If this is the intention of the Needham Public Schools, it must be clearly stated to parents.

It is also important to keep in mind that these concepts will be discussed in a context that is deliberately morally neutral, and to keep in mind that the method of instruction in and discussion of these concepts is being generated by a group that seems to believe that there are no norms. Such a context will further the detrimental effects of lesson content as it is now planned.

I recommended that we not raise “anal sex” in the lives of the students, unless we are going to characterize it as unhealthy, dangerous, and not truly sexual in nature. Also, we should not raise it unless it is for the sole purpose of assuring that they do not engage in such behavior. I argued that the

⁴⁸ SSE Report draft 1/20/10, p. 14, Grade 9, under Activities/Strategies

⁴⁹ SSE Meeting 4/12/10

⁵⁰ SSE Report, draft of 4/12/10, Appendix C, Focus Group Process

burden is on anyone who wants to insert it in the curriculum to argue for the wisdom of doing so as well as for the wisdom of what is to be said about it, and to say exactly what they will teach about it, including what their attitude about its morality will be.

Homosexual behavior

One can easily respect and love persons who experience homosexual attraction and who even act on that attraction without ceasing to think critically about the meaning of homosexual behavior and the nature of man and society. However, the intention of this curriculum proposal with regard to homosexuality is not merely to foster love and respect for all persons, whatever their inclinations. There is a great deal that the committee has not discussed about the specifics of what will be taught about homosexuality in this proposal. Although I do not have a complete picture, I have a general sense of how homosexual behavior will be treated in the curriculum, and I would welcome correction and further information about what is being proposed. My general sense is that the intention of this curriculum proposal is to normalize homosexual behavior and to teach that it is as natural and valuable as heterosexual behavior. My sense is that this will be accomplished more by what is not taught than by what is taught explicitly. I believe that homosexual behavior will be described and reflected upon as a simple matter of fact, without any suggestion there are relevant behavioral norms to be considered or meaningful distinctions to be made. My sense of the curriculum proposal is that it will include implications that such behavior is normal, good, functional, and healthy.⁵¹ However, I do not have any evidence that these ideas will be argued so as to justify them against the backdrop of well established western culture. Furthermore, lessons on prejudice⁵² and harassment may state explicitly or imply to students that to reach a negative assessment of homosexual behavior is a bad thing to do or a stupid thing to do, or is ill-informed. I am not aware of any argument made in the curriculum that traditional moral views about homosexual behavior are irrational or not supported by facts, and yet it is likely that such traditional views will be implied to be bad or wrong. It is also my impression that the rationale for the traditional view of homosexuality will not be taught, nor will the audacity of altering this view through the public school system without clear public authorization be acknowledged. If that is indeed the case, it is the obligation of the school to make it clear to the public that the traditional view of homosexual behavior will be dropped from our children's education and in its place a new view will be substituted. Furthermore, precisely what constitutes that new view must be clearly communicated to the public.

If I am correct in these impressions, and the school truly intends to promote such an iconoclastic teaching, the least it should do is argue the case to the parents and all adult residents of Needham first, clearly and forthrightly. Then, if the parents and other adults clearly approve, and if the proposal is approved by the School Committee, the School Committee should so inform all residents of Needham of this decision and the intention to implement it. Furthermore, there would be an obligation to argue the case to the students as well, as part of the lessons, after pointing out to students that this view is contrary to western culture, and after disclosing to the students that a contrary analysis of these matters is being obscured from them. Humility and honesty necessitate such policy, if social teaching is going to be radically altered by our public school system.

⁵¹ Meeting with Dr. Kathy Pinkham and Dr. Connie Barr, 3/3/10

⁵² Frameworks standard 7.7 in Grade 8

STA Day and the Day of Silence are closely related matters. The parents and residents of Needham must also be notified if and when the school will sanction events, such as STA Day and the Day of Silence, that will convey ideas contrary to established culture and convey a sense that people who have traditional sexual ideas and convictions are out-of-date, closed-minded, wrong, hateful, bigoted, or bad. See the additional section below on issues with STA Day and the Day of Silence.

Determinants of Sexual Orientation

The SSE Report draft of 4/12/10 includes Frameworks standard 4.14 on the topic of “determinants of sexual orientation” for grades 9 and 11, includes the topic “Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender (GLBT) - nature/nurture” for grade 9,⁵³ and includes the topic “LGBT-guided imagery-parent questionnaire” for grade 11.⁵⁴ I strongly suggested that “determinants of sexual orientation” not be discussed because this topic is highly speculative, because there is a great deal of controversy in the literature about the development of homosexual attraction, because the students do not need to know about these speculative ideas, and because there is great risk of misleading them. I argued that this is clearly beyond the scope of sex education for 14 year olds on 4/12/10.⁵⁵ My understanding in the 6/2/10 meeting was that it was agreed to not teach about determinants of sexual orientation at any stage of the curriculum because it is beyond the scope of the course.

Elementary School Curriculum

What, if anything, will be taught in elementary school concerning homosexuality has not been discussed in our committee. Nevertheless, it appears that the plan is to have elementary school children learn the meaning of “gay and lesbian” and “sexual orientation,” according to the latest draft of our committee report.”⁵⁶ I would advise against it on grounds that it is premature. To present such notions before sex is even dealt with in the curriculum is ill-advised. Moreover, if the school system goes ahead with this it clearly needs to justify introducing these concepts to elementary school children, which will be especially difficult to do if the school refuses to teach that sex is how a man and woman have a baby and form a family.

Theories of Personality Development, Identity Formation, and Influence of Gender on Identity

The SSE Report draft of 4/12/10 includes Frameworks standards 5.14 and 5.15 regarding personality development, identity formation, and the influence of gender on identity, among other things, for grade 10. These topics were not discussed in committee, and I am not aware of what content is being proposed here. I pointed out that these are very speculative areas of psychology and sociology, highly ambiguous, and far beyond the scope of 10th grade sex education.⁵⁷ I recommended that what will be taught on these topics should be spelled out clearly, if the committee insists on tackling these topics in sex education. There has been no resolution of this issue.

Polyamory

⁵³ SSE Report, draft of 4/12/10, Grade 9, Activities/Strategies, Section G

⁵⁴ SSE Report, draft of 4/12/10, Grade 11, Activities/Strategies

⁵⁵ SSE meeting of 4/12/10

⁵⁶ SSE report, draft of 4/12/10, Appendix A and Frameworks standard 4.3

⁵⁷ SSE meeting 4/12/10

In the 1/20/10 draft of the SSE Report this appeared: “What would you do if you contracted an STI? Would you tell your partner(s)?”⁵⁸ I suggested that we not suggest multiple partners because it implies polyamory.⁵⁹ I don’t know if that point was agreed to or not. I do not know what might be taught in the curriculum about polyamory. This matter should be discussed.

The Day of Silence and STA Day (STA = Students Take Action)

At the beginning of the SSE meetings I asked that we discuss two issues that in my view are important and in the purview of the SSE and SHAC (Student Health Advisory Council). These had to do with STA Day and the Day of Silence. The chairperson of the SSE Committee decided that these were beyond the purview of the committee. Despite my repeated requests to SHAC to discuss these issues, they were never included in the agenda and no reasons were given.

STA Day is an entire day set aside at the Pollard Middle School for all 8th graders to learn about and discuss selected current issues. It has included sexual matters, and my impression is that it often does. Several years ago, Dr. Brand, principal at Pollard, informed me that the two teachers assigned responsibility for STA Day determine the topics and who is to present them, and that neither the principal nor anyone else in the administration has any role in approving the topics or presenters. Commonly presenters are from outside the school system. I objected vigorously to the lack of supervision at the time, challenging the wisdom of allowing two teachers to develop and execute this program without any supervision or curricular guidance. No changes resulted.

At the same time, Dr. Brand informed me that the staff at the middle school deliberately refrains from informing parents about the Day of Silence unless their child wants to participate. This policy was independently verified by a teacher at Pollard. If a child chooses to participate, notice is given to parents by sending home a permission slip with the student who wants to be silent. Dr. Brand stated that the parents of the children who are not interested in participating are not informed because the school wanted to assure the safety of the students. I objected vigorously to that policy both because it obscures from parents what is occurring and because it implies that somehow parents of non-participating children would put the students at risk. My objections did not lead to any changes.

No one advised me as to where these issues might be discussed, and to my knowledge the policies remain in effect. I recommend that these policies be publicly discussed by the School Committee and either approved or adjusted.

HIV / AIDS

In the 4/12/10 SSE meeting I asked what happened to the HIV / AIDS unit that used to be taught in isolation in the 6th grade, because it was left out of the 1/20/10 draft of the SSE Report. I still don’t know the answer.

Prejudice

See Frameworks standard 7.7, 8th grade curriculum, SSE draft 4/12/10. In this standard, it is unclear what is the meaning of “detrimental effect of prejudice ... on the basis of ... sexual orientation...”. What

⁵⁸ SSE Report, draft of 1/20/10, p. 14, Grade 9, under Assessments

⁵⁹ 4/12/10 SSE Meeting 4/12/10

would some examples be? Would someone's judgement that homosexual acts are wrong be an example? What does "sexual orientation" include here? Is it heterosexuality or homosexuality? Does it also include bisexuality, polyamory, transgender and transexual orientation, pederasty, pedophilia, or sadomasochism? Some people would argue in favor of a broad acceptance of sexual practices; others would argue acceptance of all people, but rejection of specific acts. In the 6/2/10 SSE meeting I raised the question of how "prejudice" would be defined and how it would be treated in the sex education curriculum. The committee has not answered these questions. We did not have a discussion of this issue at that meeting. The community consensus in Needham was not examined by this committee. I suggested deleting this section because it is beyond the scope of the sex education course.

Hate Crimes

The SSE Report (draft 4/12/10, Grade 9) includes in Activities/Strategies section H the topic "Hate Crimes - (violence)-respecting/understanding differences." In the 4/12/10 SSE meeting I pointed out that this is a very controversial legal area regarding protected classes and beyond the scope of 9th grade sex education. In the 6/2/10 SSE meeting it was still not known what would be taught in this section. To my knowledge this has not been decided.

Harassment

The SSE Report (draft 4/12/10, Grade 10) includes Frameworks standard 9.15 regarding "harassment based on ... sexual orientation" and Frameworks standard 11.13 on the "mental health and legal consequences of harassment...." In the 4/12/10 SSE meeting I pointed out that what constitutes harassment is not easy to define, that the meaning needs to be defined clearly and publicly, and, if this topic is taught in sex education, what is taught needs to be written and not departed from. Covering such topics in sex education has a chilling effect on speech in the classroom. If the school teaches about harassment, it should do so in a separate forum and not as a part of sex education.

Statutory Rape

In any case, but especially given the encouragement of sexual activity implicit in the curriculum, I strongly suggested that students be educated about laws on statutory rape. They need to know that a crime of rape occurs even though minor participants in sexual activity have given their "consent," because the minor status of that participant means that his or her consent is not legally recognized. My impression in the 6/2/10 meeting was that there was no disagreement with this, but I do not know if a lesson about this has been included in the curriculum. See Frameworks standard 9.a in SSE Report (draft 1/20/10, p. 19, Grade 11) and standard 9.16 in SSE Report (draft 4/12/10, Grade 11).

Slang

This committee's Grade 7 recommendations include that sexual slang be taught. This was not discussed much. Attached, see the proposal for this by the faculty group that developed a preliminary curriculum in the summer of 2009. The benefit of teaching this is unclear to me, and to my knowledge was not explained or debated in the committee deliberations. The potential for students to be encouraged to use this slang because the school seems so intent upon their knowing the slang seems to be significant. Particularly concerning is the sense that the students will think up and talk about slang that will insult young women or young men. Hearing each other use these various words will desensitize students to vulgarity, is an offense against modesty, and will tend to induce prurience in the class. For example,

imagine a group of 7th grade boys and girls thinking of and saying aloud to each other all the slang words they can think of for “oral sex” or “vagina” or “penis.”

Miscellaneous Intentions

The SSE Report (draft 1/20/10, p. 6) recommended broadening sex education to include topics such as “sensuality,” “sexual energy,” “sexualization,” and “sexual identity.” The latter included “gender identity, gender roles, sexual orientation, bias”

If this committee is recommending that subjects such as gender identity, gender roles, and sexual orientation are going to be taught, it should be spelling out exactly what will be taught. Parents have a right to know this, in detail, before it is taught, and need to be able to rely on that being taught precisely, and that no more or no less is taught. It is not sufficient just to say that these things should be taught.

Pornography

See SSE Report, 4/12/10 draft, Grade 12, Activities/Strategies) This has not been discussed in the committee.

Conclusion

We might be unable to reach a consensus on the meaning of sex and normative sexual standards for our community. If we do not manage to do so, I think the public school system should decline to do sex education and put the community on notice that this education will need to be done in homes and in other communities such as churches or synagogues that have a consensus about the meaning of human sexuality.

On the other hand, we might yet join together respectfully and arrive at a consensus on the meaning of sex and on normative sexual standards. As with any compromise, most of us will not be perfectly happy with the resulting curriculum. But a consensus will be better than no shared context of meaning and exposure of our children to all kinds of ideas and activity in a value-free environment. I hope that such a curriculum will give students a context of meaning for sex in their lives. I hope it will include normative standards that will promote a healthy and vibrant community. We need to be especially aware of the forces in the world that would have the state as the primary educator rather than the parent. I hope that any curriculum will be truly authorized by parents. True authorization by parents will result in true and complete parental knowledge of what is in the curriculum and what is not in the curriculum. With this awareness, parents will be able to do their best to prepare their children for the curriculum and to modify what their children have understood from the curriculum, or to exercise their right to opt out of the curriculum. I hope that the School Committee will not approve of the curriculum as it is now being proposed, but will either continue to study this issue or decide not to do sex education in the public school system.