

Staten Island Advance

Tuesday, June 2, 1992

Board may ban acceptance of gay parents

Vote on curriculum expected next week

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A section of a first-grade curriculum that urges teachers to promote acceptance of gay and lesbian parents is expected to be banned by the Staten Island Community School Board next week.

Last night at a discussion meeting in district headquarters, Tompkinsville, board member Jerry Cammarata said the board should delete a controversial section of a Board of Education guide called "Children of the Rainbow."

The section, "Fostering Positive Attitudes Toward Sexuality," asks teachers to be aware of various family structures including lesbian and gay ones, and to acknowledge the "positive aspects of each type of household." The guide also encourages teachers to include references to lesbian and gay people "in all curricular areas."

"It's not age-appropriate and not part of our cultural base on Staten Island," said Cammarata. "We're still not relinquishing our responsibility. We will preach and teach tolerance."

The board agreed to vote on the resolution at its meeting last night.

The guide was first inspected in March by the board's curriculum committee, which Cammarata chairs. Parents were ready to battle the Board of Education plan, but the war drums were hushed after a closed-door meeting between Schools Superintendent Christy Cugini and elementary school principals.

Cugini said classroom teachers should not allude to families headed by gay and lesbian couples. Teachers should refer any

question about homosexuality to guidance counselors, social workers and parents of the inquiring child.

Wayne Steinman, an Island gay parent and founder of Center Kids, an organization for gay and lesbian parents, slammed the district's policy.

"To deny the existence of non-traditional families only hurts the child that comes from such families and further promotes homophobia," he told the Advance.

Cammarata previously said a resolution would be redundant in light of the superintendent's action. But last night, Cammarata said he had learned that a school board resolution would make the mandate legally binding.

Also at the meeting, the board decided to begin a search for a new superintendent to fill a one-year term after Cugini's contract

expires in June 1993.

In other business, board member Denise Pedro said the school board should "repudiate" Councilman Jerome X. O'Donovan for comments he made relating to a Board of Education proposal to establish a summer camp at the College of Staten Island's Sunnyside campus.

"The comments he made were a personal attack on our children," Mrs. Pedro said. "It's an affront to all children."

O'Donovan told the Advance: "I don't want other low-income kids coming here for special schools and programs running free at night."

The Staten Island Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People had condemned the councilman's

comments as "racist." O'Donovan denied the accusation, saying his opposition to the camp is based on his objection to segregating "low-income students with similar problems in one place."

School board member Jeffrey d'Auguste accused Mrs. Pedro of harboring a political vendetta. "What is your agenda for picking this one? Last council election you didn't support Jay O'Donovan. You worked against him."

Other school board members said they would reserve judgment until they read O'Donovan's comments and his subsequent explanation.

In other business, board members nominated incumbent officers on the board for a second term. A vote will be taken next week.