

# School board bans discussion of gay parents in 1st-grade

## 3 principals appointed at meeting

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The Staten Island Community School Board voted last night to bar discussing gay and lesbian parents in first-grade classes despite warnings that the measure will hurt children and perpetuate violence against gays and lesbians.

The board also appointed three principals to Island schools during its meeting in Prall Intermediate School, West Brighton.

In a 7-0 vote, the board approved a plan to delete a section of the city's multicultural curriculum guide for first grade, Children of the Rainbow.

The section asks teachers to be aware of various family structures, including gay and lesbian ones. It encourages teachers to acknowledge the "positive aspects of each type of household" and to include references to lesbian and gay families in "all curricular areas."

The board's resolution follows in the steps of school Districts 18 and 20 in Brooklyn and District 24 in Queens. The Board of Education must approve the modified curriculum.

Island teachers who defy the new policy could be brought up on disciplinary charges. Board member Denise Pedro abstained from the vote but did not say why. Board member Lillian Popp, who was at home recovering from a foot injury, sent a letter to the board opposing the resolution. Her request to have the letter read aloud was ignored.

Supporters of the resolution hailed the school board for its "bravery" in upholding

"traditional values." Opponents — who were in the minority of speakers — decried the action as bigotry.

Chris Bauer, who is "openly gay," said he spoke for many gay and lesbian families on Staten Island who are afraid to protest.

"They fear the repercussions of coming forward in a society that is still very homophobic and I am speaking on their behalf ... As a school board it is your duty to represent the entire community, including gays and lesbians, and it is the worst kind of discrimination to pick on a group that is least able to defend itself," he said.

Board Chairwoman Olivia Brennan said, "It is the duty of the school board to represent the children, (not the community)."

Peter Slomanson of St. George said teachers who acknowledge the existence of gay families could help curtail "gay bashing" on

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## Classes

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Staten Island by showing that gay people are not "inhuman or expendable."

Like many speakers supporting the resolution, Amy Kollar of Great Kills said discussions about homosexual families are inappropriate for first graders.

"How do you discuss lesbian and gay issues without explaining what a homosexual is? Where is the sense in discussing what a lesbian or gay is when it is not yet age appropriate to explain or discuss sexual relationships between a husband and wife? It is a topic that is beyond the understanding of a first grader," she said.

Another supporter, the Rev. Paul Schooling, president of the Staten Island Association of Evangelicals, said he represents 30 community churches who believe in tolerance.

"However, I continue to oppose subcultures pushing their agendas to direct and dictate curriculum policy that affects the majority of 'traditional' values," he said.

Mariann Kosovych, president of the Staten Island Federation of PTAs, said the group doesn't tolerate bias. "We only care about the education of our children. As their parents, we feel we have the right to determine what is necessary for our children to learn," she

said.

Dr. William Gough said he teaches his own children to treat all people with respect, but he isn't "obligated to accept all lifestyles or world views."

"For example, as a visiting Chinese scientist from Peking worked with me, I treated him with respect, but did not respect his Maoist communistic ideology," he said.

"We need to learn how to get together and love each other. But what does gay families have to do with multicultural groups? Absolutely nothing," said William Alfonso of Willowbrook.

The move to delete the section started in March in the board's Curriculum Committee, which is headed by Jerry Cammarata.

Parents were ready to battle the guide, but District Schools Superintendent Christy Cugini directed principals to ignore the section about gay and lesbian families. He instructed teachers to refer questions about homosexuality to guidance counselors, social workers and parents.

Saying Cugini's directive would stigmatize curious children, Tompkinsville resident Hyla Kuhlman, a "straight" mother of three children, said: "All children, even very young ones, know that the guidance counselor is sup-

posed to help solve major problems. Children who live in dysfunctional families need to be sent to a guidance counselor, (not) a child (from a gay or lesbian family) who receives care, nurturing and loving attention."

Norman Seigel, the executive director of the New York Civil Liberties Union, told the Advance last week that the resolution trounces on free speech. The United Federation of Teachers also opposed the resolution. But Pat Tataszek, the district's UFT representative, did not attend the meeting due to illness.

When reached at home after the meeting, Mrs. Popp — who said the resolution was "censorship" — was angry that the board did not read her letter.

"It's an indication of how narrow the board's thinking is. If you oppose the board, you have to be censored and I resent it," she said.

Also last night, the board named three principals to Island schools, filling all but one principal vacancy that was created in August when 19 principals retired. The board appointed Allan Newman to Egbert Intermediate, Midland Beach; Robert Rando to PS 19, West Brighton; and Lester Kostick to PS 36, Annadale. The board also voted to re-elect the current slate of officers.