

# Panel objects to AIDS curriculum

## Calls topic of condoms inappropriate for 4th grade

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A Staten Island panel on HIV/AIDS education objects to fourth-grade lessons that mention condoms as a way of preventing the fatal disease, the chairwoman of the panel said yesterday.

"A majority on the committee agreed that the discussion of how HIV is transmitted (including condom use) should not be included at the fourth-grade level," said Josephine Seiling, panel chairwoman and special assistant to the superintendent.

She issued a report yesterday during a meeting of the Staten Island Community School Board's Curriculum Committee.

The panel has not indicated when or if the lessons on HIV transmission should be included, she said.

"A minority opinion was that the teacher should determine the maturity of the children to deal with this topic," Mrs. Seiling said.

The HIV/AIDS lessons are part of a controversial new teacher's guide that outlines six lessons in grades kindergarten through six aimed at stemming the spread of AIDS.

A discussion of condoms is introduced in the fourth grade, only if the teachers feel the students are mature enough to talk about them. The Staten Island Community School Board also must give its approval.

The discussion would not include instruction of condom use, but would warn that condoms can break or leak and would describe abstinence as the "healthiest choice for young people to make."

Mrs. Seiling said members of the panel pointed out that the AIDS curriculum tackles more sophisticated subjects than the family living/sex education curriculum, which has been taught in Island schools for more than 20 years.

The family living curriculum introduces human reproduction in the fifth grade, with lessons on puberty, sperm and the fertilization of eggs. Sexual intercourse is not taught at all.

Under a mandate by Schools Chancellor Joseph Fernandez, Superintendent Christy Cugini appointed the advisory council to study

the HIV/AIDS lessons. Cugini will forward recommended changes to the school board, which will vote on revisions.

Fernandez must approve the lessons before they are introduced in September.

As part of Cugini's directive, the panel meets behind closed doors and the public is not invited. So far the panel, comprised of parents, educators, doctors and public health officials, has only reviewed lessons up to the fourth grade.

Mrs. Seiling said the panel would urge the superintendent to hire a specialist to train teachers in delivering the lessons. The school board eliminated the position of the Family Living Sex Education coordinator last year, with plans to bring in a math coordinator instead.

The Board of Education voted 5-0 in June to approve the HIV/AIDS curriculum. Staten Island board member Michael Petrides and Brooklyn board member Irene Impellizzeri abstained from the vote. The curriculum was then distributed to each of the 32 districts for review.

The Curriculum Committee, chaired by

Jerry Cammarata, yesterday discussed the role of parents in HIV/AIDS education. Some committee members said parents should be invited to observe lessons on HIV/AIDS and to listen to speakers invited into the classroom.

Others said parent participation would be disruptive to the class and could discourage children from asking questions.

Some committee members sug-

gested that the district offer workshops for parents to inform them about HIV/AIDS and to answer questions about the lessons. Others suggested that special classes be designed for parents and children.

The Curriculum Committee, whose meetings are open to the public, also will review the lessons and offer recommendations to the school board. The committee will meet again at 10 a.m. Feb. 10 at district headquarters in Tompkinsville.