

Staten Island Summer Adventure

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Will chancellor's revisions quell the 'Rainbow' dispute?

Board to discuss changes tomorrow

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Schools Chancellor Joseph Fernandez toned down a section of the "Children of the Rainbow" aimed at fighting sexism last week when he moved to end a dispute over the first-grade teacher's guide.

For the most part, the focus on the chancellor's revisions has been the softening of references to "lesbian/gay families" by changing them to "same gender couples."

But the chancellor also revised a 1½-page section called "Overcoming Sexism," which had stirred opposition among Staten Island parents. The Staten Island Community School Board deleted the section in November, then adopted a softer version.

In a similar move, the chancellor last week removed "Overcoming Sexism" from the guide. He softened and shortened the pas-

sage, then inserted it into a section called "Contextual Invisibility."

In doing so, Fernandez deleted paragraphs that had been the targets of critics, who said the they blurred gender lines. One now-deleted paragraph read:

"Challenging sexist myths can begin on the first day of school. Purposely making pink or red name tags for boys and blue name tags for girls will bring up initial discussion of why some colors have traditionally been used for boys and others for girls."

A paragraph on informal teaching opportunities in the original guide, which had raised the hackles of opponents, has also vanished from the new version. The original version read:

"At first, the boys tend to play games involving guns or trucks and the girls may play with dolls. Gradually the boys may ask if they can play with dolls and the

Original, revised text

For a side-by-side look at the Chancellor's original and revised "Children of the Rainbow" passage, see Page A 10.

girls may want to play with the trucks. (If they haven't asked after a few sessions, the teacher should.)"

The new Children of the Rainbow talks about informal teaching opportunities, but doesn't provide examples.

A suggestion that teachers should review books for sexist content also drew criticism from parents who said such criteria would rule out the classic literature. The suggestion has been modified in the new Children of the Rainbow. It says teachers should select resource materials based on "appropriateness" and goes on to say:

"Is the language sexist or rac-

Examples: Does it say "fireman" instead of "firefighter?"
Are all strong characters referred to as "he?" Are the main characters only from one racial or ethnic group?

Are parental characters shown as having equal roles and jobs both in and out of the home?
Are people with disabilities and people of various ethnic, racial, religious, or age groups shown in stereotypical ways?
Are females or males shown only in traditional roles?"

Chancellor spokesman Frank Sobrino said the changes were minor and the new guide still

Revisions

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includes a message to teachers to be aware of sexual stereotypes. "The idea that sexism exists and needs to be eliminated is still in the revised document," he said.

The school board will meet tomorrow at 7 p.m. in its Tompkinsville headquarters to discuss the chancellor's revisions. The board could decide to adopt the new Children of the Rainbow or to stick to its own revisions.

The school board also voted in November to transfer lessons on respecting gay and lesbian parents to the sixth grade, in Family Living Sex Education classes. Parents can opt to excuse their children from Family Living.

But the chancellor ruled that while the lessons can be taught in the sixth grade, they cannot be made optional. School board members will discuss how to meet the chancellor's directive tomorrow.

The chancellor said the original Children of the Rainbow, released last year, was designed to teach children tolerance for everybody, including classmates raised in gay and lesbian-headed families. He called it an anti-bias document, that had been attacked by opponents who had distorted its

content.

But educators and parents have complained that the guide is propagandistic in tone, and have cited passages in the guide that tell teachers to include "references to lesbian/gay people in all curricular areas."