

Staten Island Summer Adventure

January 29, 1995

Panel to review AIDS curriculum

By LAURA D'ANGELO
ADVANCE STAFF WRITER

Staten Island school officials will get a chance to put their pencils and erasers to the Board of Education's new HIV/AIDS curriculum this March.

Island District Schools Superintendent Christy Cugini will convene a committee to review the lesson plans for grades seven and eight, as required by state education law. Lesson plans for ninth-graders will go directly to AIDS advisory committees at each high school, according to Island High School Superintendent Noel Krifcher.

The 224-page curriculum guide

School officials to look at lesson plans, recommend changes

was approved earlier this month by a unanimous vote of the Board of Education, then forwarded to the state Education Department for review.

The guide should be in the hands of borough officials by March, according to state spokesman Chris Carpenter. It's expected to arrive in classrooms this fall.

Cugini's yet-to-be-named panel of advisers will recommend changes to the the Island Community School Board, which oversees

grades seven and eight. The board will decide on the suggestions, and vote on when teachers should introduce lessons on the sexual transmission of HIV, including anal, oral and vaginal intercourse.

All changes made by local boards "will have to be reviewed by central staff to make sure they're in compliance with state law," said Board of Ed spokesman John Beckman.

One member of the Staten Island Community School Board has vowed not merely to suggest

changes, but to lobby to scrap the new guide.

"It is a document of compromise but not a compromise that I can live with," said board member Jerry Cammarata. "There should not be an AIDS curriculum coming from the city."

The board member said each district should develop its own curriculum.

Board Chairwoman Eleanor Conforti was more cautious, saying local school officials have yet to see the lesson plans.

"If we go into this with a feeling of anger, we're going to stir up everybody. We need to take a good, long look at it first," she said.

The guide suggests that teachers for the seventh and eighth grades discuss types of sexual transmission only in response to questions. Teachers are advised to initiate the discussions in ninth grade.

The guide contains six lessons for each grade that instruct students about the immune system, how AIDS is transmitted, identifies "risky behaviors" and gives

skills to say no to drugs, alcohol and sex.

Parents have the option of taking their children out of prevention lessons by signing a statement that they will teach the material at home.

Teachers are advised to instruct through role playing and discussion. For example, intermediate school students are asked to come up with rebuttals to hypothetical offers of sex and alcohol.

Each lesson refers to abstinence as the best means of preventing the transmission of AIDS. One lesson asks students to find

activities for a couple who have chosen to "safeguard their sexual health and to abstain from intercourse." Other means to avoid AIDS are called "risk reductions."

Another lesson asks students to think about items to put into an imaginary "abstinence backpack." Tangible items include "photos of parents and family members [reminders of people who support abstinence decisions]" and the intangible qualities of "self-confidence and the courage to avoid risky behaviors."

In the seventh grade, a discussion on condoms cites a 13 percent to 27 percent failure rate for the

birth control devices when used by adolescents. Students are told that a condom's effectiveness can be increased with foams, creams and jellies containing the spermicide nonoxynol 9.

In ninth grade, the program calls for condom-use demonstrations by teachers who are told to use two fingers or an "anatomically correct model."

A review activity asks ninth-graders to arrange index cards in proper sequence. The cards include the phrases, "Buy a latex condom," "Check condom expiration date," "Place condom on erect penis."

The guide was approved by the Board of Ed's HIV/AIDS Council, which is dominated by conservatives.

But Cammarata said conservative council members took over late in the game, after a previous council already had completed the lessons for grade seven and part of grade eight.

"So this is the best they were able to get," said Cammarata,

who believes the lessons are too explicit. "This won't fly in many of the districts in the city ... I generally see across the city the demise of the document."

But Dr. Edward McCabe, a council member and an assistant director of adolescent medicine at Staten Island University Hospital, said the guide is a conservative document.

"It's very safe, very directed, very preachy and moralistic," he said. "But it's better than nothing. And that's what schools have now."

Under former Chancellor Joseph Fernandez, a curriculum guide for grades kindergarten through six was completed. In June 1993 the Staten Island Community School Board threw out that guide, saying it was too explicit.

The board adopted a 1987 state guide, which is now being taught as part of the district's health curriculum, according to Deputy Superintendent Anthony Polomene.