

KNOX COUNTY SCHOOLS


ANDREW JOHNSON BUILDING



Dr. James P. McIntyre Jr., Superintendent

MEMORANDUM

To: Chair and Members
Knox County Board of Education

From: Dr. James P. McIntyre, Jr. 
Superintendent

Date: February 25, 2011

Subject: Health & Wellness Presentations by Outside Organizations

Based on concerns that have been raised by several parents, I have reviewed the presentation and materials for those independent organizations that have been approved to present to students in the Knox County Schools as part of Tennessee's mandated health and wellness curriculum. This review was conducted with particular attention to those materials provided as part of the guest presentations made by Planned Parenthood, as this was the focal point of the concern that was raised. This review was undertaken with the expert assistance of Knox County Schools curriculum supervisors, the Knox County Health Department, and a respected health education professor from Carson-Newman College.

Findings

The Planned Parenthood presentation itself was generally found to be very appropriate and tightly aligned with specific academic standards required to be taught within the Tennessee curriculum. Most of the information used appropriate anatomical terminology and presented required material in a straightforward and factual manner. The materials on human sexuality were focused on prevention of teen pregnancy, and were largely abstinence focused, as is required in Tennessee. There were one or two instances of slang terms used rather than clinical terms in the materials, which is somewhat problematic, but this was the rare exception. The material on healthy relationships, in the opinion of the review team, was

actually quite good, and defined and promoted robust, healthy, positive relationships that encouraged personal growth and fulfillment.

While the classroom presentation itself was seen as appropriate and aligned to the curriculum, the instructor in at least one classroom did put the Planned Parenthood website address on the whiteboard at the front of the room, as a resource for students to access additional information. In discussions with Planned Parenthood, this appeared to be the standard operating procedure.

Because the website address was shared with students, a review of the website was also conducted. The Planned Parenthood website did contain material that was outside what is approved in the Tennessee Family Life curriculum, and provided links to material that would clearly be inappropriate for classroom use and could understandably have been regarded as objectionable by some parents. None of the web-based material was accessed as part of the classroom presentations.

Resulting Decision

I believe that using outside organizations that have specific content expertise to supplement instruction within our curriculum can, in many instances, add value to the education that our students receive in the Knox County Schools. This has been a successful strategy in the past, and I believe it is in our interest to continue to utilize external expertise in many areas of our curriculum, as appropriate.

However, given the sensitive nature of the material covered in the human sexuality components of the state-mandated middle and high school health and wellness curriculum, I believe it is in the best interest of our students for us to explore the feasibility of using only Knox County Schools staff and Knox County Health Department personnel to deliver this important and delicate curricular material. This particular component of the health and wellness curriculum is narrowly focused and tightly constrained, thus greatly limiting the incremental value of any outside presenters.

As we are well into the second semester of the school year, it would be very difficult to significantly change this long-standing practice without causing a high degree of disruption to teachers' plans and class schedules. However, as we examine the feasibility of relying exclusively on qualified Knox County employees to present this material, for the remainder of the school year we will not schedule any additional presentations by outside agencies regarding required curricular material on human sexuality, beyond those that have already been scheduled.

In the coming months, we will work with our health and wellness educators as well as the Knox County Health Department to develop a plan and the capacity to deliver this instruction using only the resources of the Knox County Schools and the Knox County Health Department. I have begun conversations internally, as well as with Mayor Tim Burchett and Knox County Health Department Director Dr. Martha Buchanan to ensure that the Health Department has adequate capacity to assist us in this regard beginning with the next school year.

Conclusion

Offering high quality instruction to our middle and high school students that provides medically accurate, age-appropriate factual information about human sexuality is not only a requirement in the state of Tennessee through the mandated health and wellness curriculum, it is also critical to mitigating teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections in our community. While there have been several capable organizations that have assisted us in this effort to date, I believe that our staff, coupled with personnel from the Knox County Health Department can meet this requirement and this need most effectively, accurately, and appropriately in the future.

This decision does not require any action on the part of the Board of Education. Please let me know if you have any questions.

cc: Tim Burchett, Knox County Mayor
Dr. Martha Buchanan, Knox County Health Department Director
KCS Executive Team