

New York Sex Education Curriculum Shocks Parents

Outrage. That's the word to describe how many New York City parents feel about a new sex education curriculum public schools must now enforce.

Middle and high school students will be required to take a semester of sex ed starting next spring. Department of Education Chancellor Dennis Walcott sent an email in August to all middle and high school principals, stating that they no longer had a choice about whether or not they want their students learning the controversial subject.

The *New York Post* reported that Walcott wrote: "While many of our schools have already voluntarily taken steps to include sex education in their curriculum, some have not, leaving us with an uneven system that I believe does not serve our students well."

The *Post* obtained workbooks over the weekend that will be used for the curriculum and warned that it may shock some parents.

The workbooks include controversial assignments such as high school students going to stores and recording condom prices, brands and features.

Students ages 11 to 12 will be assigned "risk cards" that rate the safety of different activities including "intercourse using a condom and an oil-based lubricant," mutual masturbation, French kissing, oral sex and anal sex.

A mother of two daughters, one a junior in high school, expressed surprise.

"I didn't know how much detail they would get," Shino Tanikawa told the paper.

The Department of Education will require one semester of sex ed in sixth or seventh grade and one in ninth or tenth grade starting next spring. Although it says schools can pick their curriculum, it recommends the HealthSmart and Reducing the Risk programs and trains teachers how to use them.

The NYC Parents' Choice Coalition, whose motto is "Taking a stand against the NYC sex ed mandate," held a press conference on Monday to voice their concerns about the new curriculum.

"I know that as my grandchildren, I want them to be able to know that abstinence is an option," group member Sylvia Laughlin said at the press conference. "It's something they have a right to choose."

The DOE says that although the program would provide more in-depth instruction regarding safe-sex practices, abstinence will still be taught, noting that the curriculum "stresses that abstinence is the best way to avoid pregnancy and STD/HIV," the *Post* reports.

"Abstinence is a very important part of the curriculum," Walcott said in a statement Monday. "But we also have a responsibility to ensure that teenagers who are choosing to have sex understand the potential consequences of their actions."

Mayor Michael Bloomberg commented: "We have a responsibility, when you have an out of wedlock birthrate and a sexually transmitted disease rate that we have in this city, to try to do something about it. Shame on us if we don't."

The *New York Post* reports that child and adolescent psychiatrist Miriam Grossman said, "Kids are being told to either abstain or use condoms—that both are responsible, healthy choices."

But the author of *You're Teaching My Child What?* argues that the DOE "relies on latex." She says the books minimize the

risks of pregnancy occurring even with condom use and that viruses such as herpes and HPV live on body parts not covered by a condom.

The DOE will allow parents to exclude their children from lessons taught on “methods of prevention,” but the NYC Parents’ Choice Coalition is urging parents to remove their children from sex ed altogether and demand that a more abstinence-driven alternative be taught.