

STATEMENT for the ALAMEDA SCHOOLS BOARD OF EDUCATION regarding the ADDITION of SEXUAL ORIENTATION/GENDER IDENTITY EDUCATION IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, AND IN PARTICULAR IN THE FIRST SECOND AND THIRD GRADES

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A. The Proposed Curriculum Does Not Fit the Safe School/Caring School Community Purposes.

The proposed Sexual Orientation curriculum is proposed as an addition to the Safe Schools/Caring School Community Curriculum mandated by the state of California. The purpose and design of the previously approved Safe Schools/Caring School Community Curriculum is to bring teachers, students and parents closer together in order to provide an optimal environment for age appropriate learning. The proposed add-on materials do not do this, as the present controversy about these materials clearly demonstrates.

Parents, teachers and the community are divided about the appropriateness, effectiveness, and purpose of this proposed curriculum add-on that is not required by the State of California.

Children in the first, second and third grade are interested in getting along well in school. Their language and behavior is not about the sexual orientation of their parents, others, or about their sexual orientation.

B. The Proposed Curriculum Does Not Address the Reported Problem.

The suggestion for this particular curriculum was generated from a 2007 Questionnaire to AUSD elementary school staff asking specific questions regarding possible problems regarding issues of gender or sexual orientation among elementary school students.

Slightly less than 50% of the responding staff observed a problem at all. Those that reported problems identified the problems as name calling, using such words as “gay”, “girly” and occasionally stronger epithets, such as “fag” or “faggot” in a derogatory way. The questionnaire did not ask for observed problems relating to race, disability, religion, body-type, learning speed

None of the adds-on materials, at least for the first and second grade, which I have had the opportunity to review, addresses the real problem, which is name-calling which is already addressed in the Caring Schools Curriculum.

The AUSD Caring School curriculum which is state-mandated and approved has at least three of its weeks specifically devoted to the problems of teasing, bullying, and disrespectful language. None of these materials discuss different races, religions, body types, disabilities, learning speeds, athletic ability, moral values or attitudes – all of which differences are referred to in name calling, teasing and bullying at the elementary school level.

The entire Caring Schools curriculum is designed to promote caring and cooperation, not by discussing differences and the often controversial ideas about them, but by showing that all children, parents/caregivers and teachers share common goals and desires – goals and desires to learn, to be treated with respect, to reach agreement cooperatively.

That caring and respect comes not from all sharing the same ideas, goals, attitudes and morals. Caring and respect comes because we are all human beings who desire caring and respect regardless of our differences (including differences in values and ideas) or the reasons for them.

The proposed curriculum does not promote unifying care and cooperation between parents, teachers and students. It promotes controversy, disagreement and misleading thought processes. It harms classroom learning because young students learn that parents and teachers are not working together. It harms classroom learning because the curriculum inappropriately causes young students to question their sexual identity. The material breeds distrust among parents, teachers and child peers because it promotes homosexual gender identification among children who are too young to have developed sexual interest, in the opposite sex or otherwise.

C. The School District is Mischaracterizing the Problem

Those mischaracterizations began with the 2007 Summary of Questionnaire Responses which prompted this proposal. First, there was no determination as to how often, if ever, derogatory remarks regarding sex appropriate dress and behavior are heard among first, second and third graders in the course of a year.

But more importantly, the survey asks the school staff to consider this a “sexual orientation and gender identity issue”. This is not a sexual orientation or gender identity issue. Because a young boy wears a pink shirt or is unathletic or is unassertive, or does not get along with the bullies in second grade, does not mean he is gay or is having gender identity issues. A tomboy is not a young lesbian, having gender identity issues.

Derogatory sexual remarks of young children are just that: inappropriate remarks degrading others who do not act, think or look like them. These remarks should be dealt with in the same manner as remarks on appearance and conduct, such as “tubby”, snitch, derogatory racial references, religious put-downs and the myriad of other ways children bully and insult each other. Young children are not sexually developed, are not interested in sex and are not in the process of identifying their sexual orientation.

However, for the school to treat these insults [or the conduct/appearance which generated the comment] as predictive of (or related to) sexual orientation or sexual orientation issues is misleading. It not only fails to address the real problem but creates a myriad of additional problems. This is evident when one looks at the materials and curriculum for first and second grade.

D. The Proposed First and Second Grade Materials are Misleading, Harmful to Healthy Childhood Development and Inappropriate.

The misleading and harmful nature of the first and second grade books is evident upon reading them.

“Who’s In a Family?” by Robert Skutch, **the first grade book** does not teach about epithets and their harmful effect. Rather it teaches with examples from the animal and human world that all kinds of families are equally valid for humans. This is a false teaching and inappropriate for first graders. It also teaches that a family is “the people who love you the most” which is a false, deceptive and dangerous teaching.

Many people, especially sexual predators, claim to love children more than their parents as a means to manipulate and abuse them. Many children do not feel loved at times by one or both of their parents, especially when they are disciplined or told “No”. The message of this book creates the idea that parents may not be a child’s real family.

“Who’s in a Family” suggests that a herd of female elephants caring for young and a separate herd of male elephants who have nothing to do with child rearing are appropriately considered “families” and can be used as models for a human family. Does the District want to suggest that in Alameda, women can or should exclude men and fathers from participating in child rearing.

“Who’s in a Family” suggests that a lion pride with one male lion and many lionesses and cubs is a family and that it is a potential model for human families. **The lion pride is used as an example of family**, where there is one father and several mothers. Is the school district suggesting bigamy as an appropriate model for families in California? Is the school district suggesting that first grade students are mature enough to meaningfully discuss the pros and cons of bigamy? And when the child learns on the Discovery Channel that when a stronger male lion takes over the pride, it kills the cubs what thoughts does that generate in the minds of young children (if lion “families” can be used as analogies to human families).

The problem being addressed by the school district is not family membership or family love. Why is the school district using materials that falsely suggest all models for human child-rearing are equivalent or equally valid? Why is such a discussion being generated among first graders who know nothing of child rearing and little experience of being reared?

The problem with this curriculum becomes totally apparent in the second grade curriculum. The book used, “AND TANGO MAKES THREE”, is a book about homosexual identification and homosexual adoption. It is not a book about false and derogatory epithets.

This is the story of penguins Roy and Silo, identified as “two boys ... who do everything together.” They walk together, swim together and do everything together, just like

second grade boys, who generally have little or no interest in girls. This is a story being read by second grade boys. Boys at that age do everything together.

This story identifies normal conduct and attitudes of second grade boys with homosexual identity and homosexual conduct. This identification is false and dangerous and promotes a misidentification by children of close friendship with homosexuality. This is compounded by the zookeepers remark, "They must be in love."

This story is totally inappropriate to teaching on inappropriate remarks and safe schools. It is totally appropriate to advocating and promoting homosexual adoption, which is not the issue nor an appropriate issue for safe schools of second graders.

The false teaching and misleading analogies and comments continue to the end of the story. The zoo keeper names that baby penguin hatched by Roy and Silo as Tango "because it takes two to make a Tango." Of course, Roy and Silo did not make Tango, they just sat on the egg. The story concludes "Hooray Roy! Hooray, Silo!" as if they deserved special commendation above the other penguins who were rearing their penguin chicks."

The story teaches young boys to identify with homosexuality. It does nothing to combat derogatory remarks based upon sex, gender or sexuality. Rather it can prompt heterosexual boys not to develop close friendships with other boys for fear of being identified as gay and it can prompt some young boys who want close friendships with other boys to think that they are gay or to identify themselves as homosexual when they desire normal bonding with other boys at that age.

There is no time to discuss other problems with the curriculum. Rather it needs to be dropped or reworked to address, if necessary, the problem of inappropriate and derogatory remarks in regard to sex or gender.