

Dillon, S. AIDS Curriculum: Fighting Words. (1994, October 24). The New York Times, pp. B1, B6.

OVERVIEW

Writing the teaching guide about AIDS in the New York City schools has become something of "trench warfare." Mrs. Philips has been fighting to make sure that the curriculum, above all, encourages abstinence. Ms. Zurer has been waging rear-guard battle to insure that it also includes plenty of information about condoms.

The two adversaries and their respective supporters on the AIDS advisory council have struggled for months over the junior high school curriculum. They are not alone in their struggles. The Sexuality Information and Education Center, a Manhattan group that studies sex education nationwide, reports that parents in at least 250 other cities and towns are embroiled in similar disputes over balancing abstinence and condoms in sex education.

Since 1987, when the State Education Department required all schools to teach about AIDS, writers commissioned by the school board have developed AIDS curricula for the city's elementary, intermediate, and high schools. Driving the clashes in New York City are not only political disagreements between Ms. Zurer, an unabashed liberal, and Mrs. Philips, a conservative, but also are deeply held views of how adolescents should be taught. Ms. Zurer believes they should be exposed to comprehensive information about sexuality and allowed to make their own choices. Mrs. Philips says they should be taught what is right and wrong. One confrontation focused on a lesson for ninth graders. Mrs. Philips proposed appending to the statement, "Sexual intercourse involves the risks of pregnancy and disease" the phrase, "and death from AIDS." Ms. Zurer objected to the amendment, arguing that the curriculum "should not aim to frighten children."

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. Which teaching philosophy do you think is more effective? Why?
2. How do you think this controversial issue could be discussed more effectively?

IMPLICATIONS

1. Again, educators are stymied by whether to push abstinence or safe sex. While at seemingly opposing ends of the sexual spectrum, they are often offered together as solutions for young people.
2. Reduction of trends in smoking and drug use following effective campaigns is documented. Growth in "True Love Waits" and other teenage movements shows the possibility of reducing sexual activity among young people.
3. Methods of reducing high-risk behavior in a culturally diverse, secular society may vary. The goal of all youth advocates should be to encourage responsible, healthy lifestyles.

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