

NEW YORK**Gays dropped from multicultural program**

Despite opposition from its own Schools Chancellor, the New York City Board of Education has decided to drop Gays from the system's multicultural educational program.

In a 4-3 vote on Feb. 15, the board voted to limit multicultural education to racial, ethnic, and linguistic groups.

Sexual orientation, along with age, gender, religion and disability, were placed in a separate anti-discrimination curriculum in which students would learn about laws and regulations that protect various groups from discrimination.

The proposed changes prompted fierce opposition from Gay groups and other organizations that said multicultural education would be severely weakened. The original idea behind multicultural studies is to integrate discussions about the history, culture, and contributions of various groups into regular courses.

Following the vote, Frances Kunruether, executive director of the Hetrick-Martin Institute, a social service agency for Gay youth, commented that the exclusion of Gays from multicultural

education would have a "chilling impact" on the schools.

Kunruether said teachers will be much more reluctant to discuss Gay-related issues in the classroom.

"The religious right ... has been enormously effective in saying you can't talk about these issues," Kunruether said. "Gay and Lesbian youths will be more and more marginalized and see fewer options just when they were coming to believe people can be on their side."

At a public hearing prior to the vote, Hetrick-Martin policy and communications coordinator Andrew Humm said the revisions "represent a tremendous step back for the cause of recognizing diversity, ending bigotry and celebrating difference."

The changes, initiated by board President Carol Gresser of Queens, followed the furor two years ago over the "Children of the Rainbow" multicultural curriculum, which included teaching respect for Gay families starting in the first grade.

Widespread protests led to the removal of then Chancellor Joseph Fernandez, and caused the school system to

revise the "Rainbow" curriculum.

Gresser told the *New York Times* she wanted to separate multicultural and anti-discrimination education to eliminate "confusion, misunderstanding and uncertainty." The restructuring, she said, would "strengthen" multicultural education.

But Schools Chancellor Ramon Cortines, usually an ally of Gresser, opposed her plan, as did the Board of Education's Multicultural Advisory Board, which called her proposals "educationally unsound."

Critics said all groups, including Gays, should be in the multicultural education. In a memo to board members, according to the *Daily News*, Cortines wrote, "One cannot address multicultural education without simultaneously addressing issues of discrimination."

But the board split along conservative-liberal lines, with the two appointees of Mayor Rudolph Giuliani voting with the four-member majority. Lenny Alcivar, a spokesperson for Giuliani, said the mayor felt the changes were a "reasonable compromise."

—Peter Freiberg