

Minority opposes 'pro-gay' course

Fairfax sex education under fire

By Maria Koklanaris
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Critics of Fairfax County's sex-education program last night charged that the curriculum contains a "pro-homosexual" bias that presents a danger to young people.

"Our teachers are forced to teach as true what has not been established as true," the Rev. Cornelius O'Brien, pastor of St. Timothy's Church in Chantilly, told the Fairfax County School Board. "That homosexuality is an acceptable lifestyle, that opponents are either homophobic or prejudiced or both."

The criticism comes as the School Board prepares for a March 9 vote on several key components of the curriculum, including material students learn about homosexuality, abstinence, sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy.

Critics, some of whom sit on the committee that advises the School Board on sex education, are seeking a major overhaul of the lessons.

They want to strike the material on homosexuality, particularly the two classroom periods ninth-grade students spend on the subject. And they want a stronger abstinence message that focuses more on avoiding sexual relations than on avoiding pregnancy and disease.

The complaints are the focus of a 57-page report the School Board received last night from the minority faction of the Family Life Education Curriculum Advisory Committee (FLECAC).

The minority group, made up of seven of the committee's 36 members, presented its report to rebut the majority report the board received Feb. 9. That re-

port seeks only minor changes in the sex-education curriculum.

And some parents last night said they want only minor adjustments.

"I am here to express my support for the majority report," said Michael Tobias, a Herndon parent. "I have lived in Fairfax County for three years and what I see here scares me. What I see is a small minority who are chipping away at our constitutional rights."

The minority group and other critics of the program laid much of the blame for the bias they see in it at the feet of Jerald Newberry, coordinator of the family life education program.

They criticized Mr. Newberry's work with the National Education Association, for which he has developed training programs on the "issues and concerns to gay, lesbian and bisexual education employees" and "affording equal opportunity to gay and lesbian students through teaching and counseling."

Critics also pointed to Mr. Newberry's receipt of a human rights award last summer from the NEA. The Gay and Lesbian Caucus of the NEA nominated him for the award because of the training programs. Critics said the programs and award show that Mr. Newberry has a "pro-gay" bias that he is passing on to children who take sex education.

But Mr. Newberry said yesterday that the county's lessons on homosexuality were developed in 1989, before he took his current job in 1990. He also said that developing and choosing curriculum is a six-step process involving parents, teachers, clergy and administrators, but that the final decision rests with the School Board.