

# Sex-ed flap a part of policy

## Girls routinely see boys' film in Fairfax

By Walden Siew  
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

A misunderstanding over which children would be shown Fairfax County's library of approved sex-education films has led some members of the School Board to brand the mix-up another example of how administrators can botch the sensitive subject of the birds and bees.

At issue is a charge by Larry Wiggins, 39, and his wife, Blanca, 43, of Centreville that a Centreville Elementary School vice principal misled them by saying their fifth-grade daughter would only see films dealing with the sexual development of girls. The Washington Times reported their complaints yesterday.

Amanda Wiggins, 11, and the other girls in her class saw a 10-minute video showing a discussion of two boys who had erections during a science class. The video, "Kids to Kids: Boys," discusses changes that occur in boys during puberty.

The point was to show that erections are natural, a school official said.

Regardless of what point was  
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## POLICY

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being made, Mrs. Wiggins said she wouldn't have let her daughter take the class if she had known about the film.

Sex education is a "hot-button item," said School Board member Carter S. Thomas of the Springfield District. "This is not an isolated case. This happens all the time. There will be an administrative screw-up or whatever. This happens too often."

In April 1994, an Oakton High School teacher showed an unapproved film called "The Coming Out of Heidi Leiter," about teenage lesbians.

The film depicts a lesbian couple who want to attend the high school prom together. It shows the teens kissing.

After a parent objected, the teacher was reprimanded but kept her job. The parent had requested that her 15-year-old freshman daughter be excused from all sex-education classes.

In the Wiggins case, some School Board members originally objected to girls watching the boys video and vice versa, but they lost an 8-4 vote on the issue last year, said board member Gary Reese, who represents the Sully District,

where Amanda's school is.

Mr. Reese said Centreville has a highly competent principal and staff, and "if it was a misunderstanding, it was just that."

Jane K. Strauss, who represents the Dranesville District on the School Board, said she respects parents who believe that sex education for fifth-graders is inappropriate, but she said information about both sexes is necessary for those who want it.

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School Board member, Springfield District

"This is an example where one hopes that the parents had all the material they needed to make that decision," Mrs. Strauss said. "It's not to be forced on any family, any parent or any child."

If parents object to their children learning such terms as "erection" and "ejaculation," they can opt out at any time, but the terminology is necessary to understand the human reproductive system, she said.

"It's very hard to explain if you're only talking about the fe-

male body," Mrs. Strauss said. She said it is a problem if a parent is not aware of the material.

"If the parent requested that her daughter not be exposed to this information, then, yes, the school system was in error," Mrs. Strauss said.

Susan Kane, the principal at Centreville, and Vice Principal William Rice declined to comment.

Children who opt out of the courses are given computer science work or another "valid academic experience" during the sex-education classes, Mrs. Strauss said.

Mr. Reese and other conservatives used the incident to repeat their original criticism of the sex-education curriculum.

"You're bound to have this kind of misunderstanding when you have a School Board adopt the kinds of policies that we have

adopted on family life education," Mr. Reese said.

Marie Sterne, the county's instructional coordinator for health and physical education, said the incident was a "misunderstanding."

"At this point I don't know who's telling the truth," she said.

According to school policy, sex-education videos selected by the School Board are shown to both sexes in the school system's 132 elementary schools, 23 middle schools and 23 high schools, she said. Most of the videos were made in 1993.

"Parents have an option and are invited to see the films and can make a decision as to whether they want to participate," Miss Sterne said.

About 140,000 children attend Fairfax County public schools. Last year about 3 percent of parents opted their children out of at least part of the sex-education curriculum.

Mr. Thomas also said the incident refocuses debate on 1987 state legislation that gave local school boards the authority to develop a sex-education curriculum.

He noted there is no state mandate for such a curriculum.

"In my opinion the state Board of Education has no authority to implement this program," he said.

"I agree there needs to be sex education, but it has to be age-appropriate," Mr. Thomas said.

## PRE-TEEN SEX EDUCATION

These videos are approved materials for fifth- and sixth-grade students in Fairfax County public schools. Parents may keep their students out of the five days of sex-education classes. About 3 percent opted to do so in the 1995-96 school year.

### Fifth grade

"A Is for AIDS," 1993. 15 minutes

Explains the functioning of the immune system and how it is affected by the human immunodeficiency virus. Children living with HIV are interviewed. (Sex-separated class)

"Kids to Kids: Boys," 1993. 10 minutes

Information about changes in growth and sexual development of males during puberty. (Sex-separated class)

"Kids to Kids: Girls," 1993. 25 minutes

Information about changes in growth and sexual development of females during puberty. (Sex-separated class)

"The New Improved Me: Understanding Body Changes," 1995. 25 minutes

Reviews changes in males and females that occur during puberty and how male and female reproductive organs function.

### Sixth grade

"Girl to Woman," 1992. 19½ minutes

Explains physical and emotional changes during puberty and how female reproductive organs function. (Sex-separated class)

"Boy to Man," 1992. 19½ minutes

Explains the physical and emotional changes during puberty and how male reproductive organs function. (Sex-separated class)

"Fertilization and Birth," 1991. 15 minutes

An introduction to human and animal reproduction that answers students' questions about where babies come from. Included is a lesson that illustrates that parenting is a job for responsible adults. (Sex-separated class)

"I Have AIDS . . . A Teenager's Story," 1988. 28 minutes

Ryan White, who later died of AIDS, answers questions from fifth-graders about it, including myths and facts about how the disease is spread. (Sex-separated class)

Source: Fairfax County public schools, Office of High School Instruction and K-12 Curriculum Services