



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on October 25, 2011

NYC's Sex-Ed Curriculum Provokes Parental Rights Debate

The debate over sex education in public schools has always been contentious, but the often-graphic new sex-ed curriculum being taught in New York City public schools — declared by even the New York Times to be in violation of parental rights — is raising the bar on some of that controversy.

The curriculum, designed by NYC school chancellor Dennis Walcott (left), was recommended for the school system's new sex-education classes, which were mandated for the first time in nearly two decades.

Walcott said of the curriculum, "We have a responsibility to provide a variety of options to support our students, and sex education is one of them."



The *New York Times* [reports](#) that the new mandate "is part of a broader strategy the Bloomberg administration announced last week to improve the lives of black and Latino teenagers. ... According to city statistics, those teenagers are far more likely than their white counterparts to have unplanned pregnancies and contract sexually transmitted diseases."

Mayor Bloomberg announced a three-year, \$130-million initiative to reach that goal, of which the sex-education mandate is a part. The city administration also said it hoped the new curriculum will "bring a measure of cohesion to a patchwork system of programs" which until now were chosen by school principals.

"It's obviously something that applies to all boys and all girls," said Linda I. Gibbs, the deputy mayor for health and human services. "But when we look at the biggest disadvantages that kids in our city face, it is blacks and Latinos that are most affected by the consequences of early sexual behavior and unprotected sex."

According to an analysis by the Guttmacher Institute, between 2006 and 2008, one in four teenagers received instructions in school on abstinence that were not accompanied by instructions regarding contraceptive methods. By January 2010, however, 20 states, as well as the District of Columbia, were mandating sex education and HIV information in schools, with an additional 12 states, including New York, ordering only HIV education.

But New York City's new mandate goes well beyond the state's requirement to provide a semester of health education classes. According to the *Times*, "The city's mandate calls for schools to teach a semester of sex education in 6th or 7th grade, and again in 9th or 10th grade, suggesting they use [HealthSmart](#) and [Reducing the Risk](#), out-of-the-box sets of lessons that have been recommended since 2007. A city survey of principals last year found that 64 percent of middle schools were using the HealthSmart curriculum."

The *New York Post* [conducted](#) a careful analysis of the sex education workbooks which will be used in



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the classroom next year. Stated assignments in those workbooks include finding stores that sell condoms and recording their cost, researching how to get to a clinic which provides birth control and tests for sexually-transmitted diseases, and “risk cards” which require students to learn the relative dangers of a variety of sexual activities.

According to the *Post*, the curriculum asks students to visit a website managed by Columbia University entitled, “Go Ask Alice,” which provides details about sexual positions and non-intercourse sex.

Still, the Department of Education insists that it continues to encourage abstinence as the best choice.

Though the DOE asserts that parents may opt their children out of lessons on contraception, a *New York Times* editorial notes that the opt-out is “very limited” because it permits parents to remove their children only from classes covering birth control and contraception, and not those which “graphically name a variety of solitary and mutual sex acts.”

Both contributors to the *NYT* op-ed, Robert George and Melissa Morchella, assert that the curriculum is clearly trying to “sexualize” children at younger and younger ages:

No one can plausibly claim that teaching middle-schoolers about mutual masturbation is “neutral” between competing views of morality; the idea of “value free” sex education was exploded as a myth long ago. The effect of such lessons is as much to promote a certain sexual ideology among the young as it is to protect their health.

George and Morchella also contend that the curriculum is in violation of parental rights:

Beyond rival moral visions, the new policy raises a deeper issue: Should the government force parents — at least those not rich enough to afford private schooling — to send their children to classes that may contradict their moral and religious values on matters of intimacy and personal conduct? ...

Unless a broader parental opt out is added, New York City’s new policies will continue to usurp parents’ just (and constitutionally recognized) authority. Turning a classroom into a mandatory catechism lesson for a contested ideology is a serious violation of parental rights, and citizens of every ideological hue should stand up and oppose it.

In Canada, parents are fighting an equally controversial proposed curriculum. *The Blaze* [reports](#), “The Institute for Canadian Values began a petition to prevent government officials from updating grade school sex education curriculum with content that could ‘confuse’ children about their sexual orientation and other LGBT topics that it deems are appropriate.” It is part of a “Stop Corrupting Children” campaign launched against the sex-ed curriculum in Canada that was originally introduced in 2010 but was removed after parents voiced their outrage. The curriculum is now being reworked by Canadian officials and is expected to include such controversial elements as masturbation, sexual orientation, and anal sex.



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