PS1 for 5/5/88#PARENTS SPEAK UP ABOUT CURRICULUM

Parents are speaking up and having their input on the development of curricula for sex, AIDS, and so-called family living. In Alabama and Virginia, months of citizens' protests, testimonies at public hearings, news conferences, and letters to the editor and public officials have paid off with significant improvements in the instructional materials used in public schools.

The Alabama story started in the spring of 1987 when the State Board of Education mandated AIDS education without any specifics as to what that should be. Parents leaped at the opportunity to fill in the details by promoting a message of ""Just say NO'' to both sex outside of marriage and drugs.

Funny thing, although educators and counselors have finally realized the necessity of a firm ""say NO to drugs'' style of teaching, they still seem to want to fuzzy up the teaching about sexuality with a mishmash of situation ethics. Perhaps that is because a massive infrastructure has grown up making money out of promiscuity, but profiting from drugs is possible only for those willing to engage in illegal activities.

For a few months, Alabama parents engaged in a face-off with the Alabama Department of Public Health over the inclusion in the curriculum of the controversial Surgeon General's booklet on AIDS, which included the toll-free hotline number of the National Gay Task Force. Parents argued that Everett Koop's report was never designed for classroom use and was not appropriate for students to study.

One parent then conducted an experiment. She called the hotline number, representing herself as a high school student, and found that the Gay Task Force representative recommended homosexual books and attempted to recruit the ""teenager'' into homosexuality.

He told her, ""Now, if you run into a book that says gay is bad,

put it away! Don't read it. You need to understand, being gay is just another option. It's not normal to be left-handed, but many of us are. The 'not normal' argument is hogwash. But there are plenty of religious nuts who say it's bad.''

The Alabama parents then sent copies of the shocking phone conversation to each Board of Education member and to the press. The Board responded by taking away the responsibility of producing an AIDS curriculum from the Public Health Department and turning it over to the Alabama Department of Education, which by now was very willing to accept input from parents.

Various parents groups gave their constructive suggestions at public hearings in four major cities. The result was that the final draft came out loud and clear for ""Say NO to sexual activity'' and to ""known risk behaviors.'' Students will be told, ""Even though condoms can provide a protective barrier, they can fail also. So, consider the consequences of trusting your life to condoms.''

The curriculum even quotes Webster's Dictionary as authority for the definition of ""responsible,'' namely, ""able to distinguish between right and wrong and to think and act rationally, and hence account for one's behavior.''

In Virginia, similar citizen activity over the last year and a half contributed to improving a sex education curriculum for grades K through 12. Pro-family groups pointed out that, not only is there no evidence that sex education has reduced teen pregnancy, but that, in five of the six Virginia school districts with the most comprehensive sex education, the pregnancy rate has risen substantially while the rate for the state as a whole has been dropping.

By the time of the final vote in the state legislature on the appropriation for the so-called Family Life curriculum, the state superintendent of education had agreed that local schools could

develop their own program. He also agreed to require ""broad based'' community involvement and an annual opportunity for parents to review instructional materials prior to the start of the school courses.

The guidelines were changed by the board to require teaching abstinence ""until marriage.'' Schools also must provide instruction on the Virginia statutes dealing with sexual behavior and misconduct, which are fully in accord with traditional moral standards.

The Alabama and Virginia experiences prove the value of parental involvement in curriculum development on sensitive subjects that concern morals, values, and family privacy. Whether schoolchildren take illegal drugs or engage in promiscuous behavior will inevitably have a large if not decisive impact on their entire lives, and adults have the responsibility to give them the guidance that will enable them to live clean lives.