from Phyllis Schlafly

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Parental Victory in Colorado Public Schools

Parents of children in the Boulder Valley (Colorado) School District won a landmark victory in September when the superintendent mailed to every family a 17-page pamphlet entitled "Students' and Parents, Rights.tt The publication of this pamphlet capped a two-year campaign by Boulder parents to protect their children from intrusive psychological procedures in the classroom such as hypnosis, psychodramas, psychological fantasizing, and nosy questionnaires.

Section C on Student Psychological Services affirms that “only those persons holding relevant certificates or licenses nay expose students to a psychiatric or psychological method or procedure.” The pamphlet states that “parents can exclude a student from any psychological service by an advance written notice” and that “allowed procedures may only be performed after acquiring written permission from a student/s parent or guardian.”

Section A on Health Education assures parents that they have the right to be “notified in writing, prior to the student's attendance in a health education course, of topics to be taught.” They also have the right to “inspect all health program materials during school hours upon request” and to “exclude their child from all or part of health instruction by submitting an approved exclusion form.”

The right to exclude their children from “all or part” of sex education is particularly important to parents because the entire course may be objectionable to some, but only a small part may be objectionable to others. Many public schools now have a policy called “infusion” under which they integrate psychological or explicit-sex materials with academic work and then tell the parents that it is “impossible” to separate the one from the other.

The booklet sets up accountability about materials used in sex education classes. It states that, “all audio-visual and supplementary classroom instructional materials related to human sexuality shall be reviewed regularly by a committee of teachers and administrators.”

Parents believe it is important not only that they have the right to exempt their children from any or all of the school's health education programs, but also that the

school must make full disclosure of all health education curricula to parents and students. The exemption and disclosure requirements together help to achieve a friendlier relationship between parents and school administrators.

The Boulder Valley school policy is the result of a state law that went into effect July 1, 1990 requiring all boards of education “to formally adopt a policy concerning the delivery of all educational programs and courses of instruction or study which expose pupils to any psychiatric or psychological methods or procedures involving the diagnosis, assessment, or treatment of any emotional, behavioral, or mental disorder or disability.”

The 1aw required the state department of education to “prepare model policies to provide guidance to boards of education” about this policy. In addition, the law requires that all boards “provide adequate opportunity to allow review by and receive recommendations from” parents and others.

Parents put two years of work into the effort to make sure that local school boards implement this law, writing hundreds of letters to their state legislators and to the Colorado state department of education. At first, parents had a hard time convincing officials that the target of their complaints was not academic courses but psychiatric techniques masquerading as academics.

Parents generally don't know what, if any, their rights are in relation to their 1oca1 public school, and oftentimes a school system conceals or tries to evade parental rights laws. This booklet opens with a message from the superintendent encouraging “parent involvement in the educational programs of their children” and inviting parents to call the superintendent or principal “if you have questions.”

Since the publication of the booklet, the Boulder Valley schools have been much more open about curriculum. Materials sent home to parents now provide a good overview of courses that contain psychological or health content, a list of the dates on which controversial topics will be discussed, instructions about how to find out more information, and an easy form for parents to use if they want to exempt their children from any or all of the course.

As a result, it is now a routine and simple procedure for parents to exempt students from courses in self-esteem, stress, suicide, death and dying, sex, and experimental courses on AIDS.

Boulder Valley parents believe that their involvement in this two- year process explodes the myth of "parent apathy," which is a frequent excuse given by the public schools to justify their use of psychological and behavioral courses. The Boulder Valley experience shows that parents will be involved when they are informed about what is going on and when the school receives parents with an open-door policy instead of with hostility and the parroting of epithets such as "censors," "fundamentalists," and "enemies of the public schools."