

Harassment curriculum eyed for elementary

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A new health curriculum program considered by the Farmington Board of Education strives to help elementary school students set an early foundation about physically and verbally respecting their classmates.

"Respecting Myself and Others," the proposed sexual harassment prevention program, would provide for a "developmentally appropriate sequence of experiences," including what does or does not constitute "appropriate

touch," for example. The program could be approved by school board members at Tuesday's 7:30 p.m. meeting, slated for the Lewis Schulman Administrative Center on Shinnwassee Road.

Presenting the program during last week's school board meeting were district health coordinator Kathy McElroy, who helped spearhead the program's development, and elementary principals Lasecia Jones and William Smith.

The committee was formed three years ago, in response to

changes to the state's school code in the area of sexual harassment prevention, which requires training for students and staff.

According to McElroy, the program teaches about sexual harassment prevention—in age-appropriate lessons—to children from the beginning of their school careers. Many "personal safety" and related lessons are reiterated throughout elementary school so that children are knowledgeable and aware about such problems when they reach middle school.

Many of those skills and concepts already are being taught to students, through the district health curriculum. The new program would build on that framework, district officials said.

In "Respecting Myself and Others," explained McElroy to the board, "Some skills are repeated over and over at many grade levels, so that hopefully, they'll be able to better handle the pressures of adolescence."

Jones said that at the elementary school level sexual harassment is rare. "But behaviors and attitudes are there, such as teasing and name calling."

That's why "it's a good start" to teach children the do's, don'ts and what-to-look-for as early in life as possible, Jones emphasized.

In a breakdown of grade-by-grade lessons, McElroy said kindergarten and first graders might learn to identify similarities and differences, how to

appreciate uniqueness. Curriculum also delves into saying "no" to strangers and the "good touch, bad touch" scenario.

Fourth-graders might start discussing issues such as responsibility, self-control, "more talk about feelings and the art of communication," McElroy continued.

In the fifth grade, students would work on issues such as dealing with bullies, conflict resolution, peer pressure and refusal skills, avoiding violence and building positive relationships.

McElroy said teachers would receive necessary training, including interaction with police, to teach the new lessons.

School board members sound-

ed somewhat optimistic about the program, but want parents to be kept informed and updated about it.

Board Secretary Linda Enberg said she liked the "positive approach of identifying what is positive touch, like a pat on the back."

Meanwhile, trustee Gary Sharp stressed the need for parents to "sign off" on the curriculum, should it be approved by the board.

"It's a shame to see that, in what we think is an enlightened society, we're faced with these types of concerns," said Sharp, who is the father of two elementary school children. "... We need to make sure they (parents) have seen this."

Farmington Observer

(USPS 187-840)

Published every Sunday and Thursday by Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 805 E. Maple, Farmington, MI 48030-0910. Periodicals postage paid at Farmington, MI 48030-0910. Postmaster: Send address changes to Observer & Eccentric, Newspapers 805 E. Maple, Farmington, MI 48030-0910. Telephone 541-1100.

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