

Fremont school district delays adopting controversial health book, will work with publisher to change it

By Chris De Benedetti | The Argus

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12 COMMENTS



FREMONT -- The use of a health textbook some deemed inappropriate for students has been delayed, giving school district leaders time to consult the book's publisher over its chapters on sexual education.

The Fremont Unified school board held off on adopting "Your Health Today" on Wednesday night, after parents complained that its discussion of **bondage**, prostitution and other frank sexual topics was unfit for teaching ninth-grade students.

At the board meeting's outset, Superintendent James Morris recommended that trustees choose among three options. Two choices involved revising "Your Health Today" to varying degrees. A third option would create two different health courses, including an honors health class using the new textbook.

The five-member board decided that the district should work with the publisher to make changes to the book, creating a high school edition that will be age-appropriate for 14-year-olds.

The motion passed on a 3-2 vote, with trustees Larry Sweeney and Lily Mei dissenting.

District employees will bring a report on those changes back to the school board by January. Meantime, Fremont teachers temporarily will use last year's health textbooks.

Some book opponents, such as teacher Jonna Carlile, called for a fourth option: selecting a new health textbook.

"The settings (in the new book) were all adult settings," Carlile said. "There's nothing in there about helping a young person make the right decisions."

The board vote followed more than three hours of debate amid dozens of speakers and a feisty, standing-room-only audience of 250 people. About two-thirds of them waved yellow signs that read, "Remove College Textbook."

The majority of the nearly 60 speakers said they opposed using "Your Health Today."

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"When I looked at the book, I couldn't believe the topics that were in there," parent Jim Schultz said. "Bondage? ... How is that a healthy thing to teach a ninth-grade student?"

Others who favor the new textbook waved green signs that read, "I support comprehensive sex education."

Supporters of "Your Health Today" warned the board and book opponents of being swayed by fear and emotion, rather than the facts.

"Please don't let your narrow views of human sexuality affect my child's education," said parent Sarah Jeske.

The controversy started June 25, when Fremont school board members voted 3-2 to buy copies of the book for \$204,600.

The 392-page text was chosen among several books after a review process that included input from teachers and parents, district leaders said.

But community opposition built in recent weeks as news of the book's contents spread among district parents.

As of Wednesday evening, a petition on the website Care2 had about 2,500 signatures calling for the book's removal. A hard-copy petition also has garnered about 1,500 signatures, said Asfia Ahmed, a parent opposing the new text.

District leaders say they recommended holding off on using the new textbook after receiving feedback from parents and health teachers.

Morris said last week that delaying the book's adoption aligns with health instructors' goal of teaching the state standards in ways that are age-appropriate, accurate and sensitive.

"It will remain our goal when working with the publishers to make revisions to the text," he said.

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