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Bullies force anti-bullying plan revamp

"Controversial" (read, "homosexual") items have been removed

by Carrie Smith

CHARLESTON, WV — Questionable material in the attorney general's controversial anti-bullying program has been removed, and other resources are being reviewed to determine if they are appropriate for West Virginia public schools.

Deputy Attorney General Fran Hughes said national publications which referenced hate crimes were yanked from the state's Civil Rights curriculum after parents and Christian groups complained the publications promoted homosexuality.

The "Civil Rights Team Project" is a statewide project teaching students to recognize and stop hate in hallways and classrooms.

"The materials were not prepared in our office. As soon as they were brought to our attention we studied them," DAG Hughes said. "We decided to pull them out of the schools because we didn't think it (homosexuality) was a matter our office should be involved in."

The "controversial" publications came from the National Education Association, Gay Lesbian and Straight Education Network and Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays. They suggest students and teachers use inclusive language such as "parent" instead of mother or father, "date" instead of boyfriend or girlfriend and "permanent relationship" instead of marriage.

Some of the material also encourages stu-

dents to serve as support systems for gay students by wearing T-shirts or buttons with pink triangles or slogans like "Straight but not Narrow."

Hughes said the program, which has been halted by the state Board of Education while members conduct an investigation, will likely be revamped to include some pro-family materials.

"We want to emphasize how we are alike rather than how we are different," she said. "We all have a share in humanity and don't want to single out specific groups."

Organizations such as the American Family Foundation complained that the program promoted homosexuality in the schools by using materials that said it was acceptable for teens to engage in "same-sex intimate relationships."

Hundreds of parents attended an October school board meeting to stage a protest. Some state board members were not even aware the program was being operated in about 20 of the state's 800 schools and placed it on hold while they gathered some information.

At press time, the Civil Rights Team Project has not been reinstated. The state board did, however, recently pass a student code of conduct prohibiting bullying, intimidation and harassment.

Kevin McCoy, director of the West Virginia chapter of the American Family Association, who led the opposition to the attorney general's program, said he is pleased with the changes.

His biggest complaint was the materials made reference to homosexuals and included them in categories for hate crimes. West Virginia has not passed a law to include that group in its hate crime legislation, though it has been debated for several years.

"If the Legislature can't even come to a conclusion about it, then it has no business in the schools," he said. "Schools should not be used for political purposes."

Hughes said she plans to include groups such as the American Family Foundation and parent groups in discussions about the revamped programs. She said that children are harassed in school for many reasons and the new focus of the program will be on the fact they are indeed bullied but will not separate children into groups.

"We just want to prevent children from being targeted, period," she said. "We won't focus on why, just that they are and we hope to do something about it."

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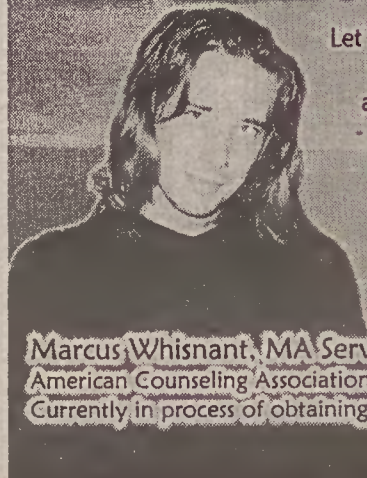
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