

Committee to examine high school health issues

by Darren MacDonald
Staff

Lake Superior High School has set up a committee to examine, among other things, the school's human sexuality curriculum and the possibility of installing condom machines at the high school.

The Secondary School Health Issues Committee at LSHS is one of three set up in the Lake Superior Board of Education's area.

Similar committees have also been set up at high schools in Marathon and Manitowadge.

"The committee will review the existing curriculum for human sexuality, parenting and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), especially AIDS," says committee chairperson and LSHS Principal Gail Conrad-Davey. "The committee will review what's being done in schools right now in terms of teaching those issues."

Davey says the committee will also review the level of access students have to health services, including counselling from the Thunder Bay District Health Unit, community support groups, hotlines and school support services.

The committee will also look at other issues, including teenage pregnancy and condoms.

The committee itself consists of representatives from the teaching staff, parents, students, public health nurses and school board trustees.

"After the reviews are done, the job of the committee will be to see if there are any gaps, and to make recommendations to the (Lake Superior) School Board as to how they can improve the curriculum, add to the curriculum, or delete from the curriculum," says Davey.

The committee has held one meeting already, and the school staff will be making a presentation on the existing curriculum at the next meeting, scheduled for Dec. 7.

"We'll be listening to everybody's opinion, and hopefully

the committee will be able to agree on some recommendations," says Davey. "There's a committee in each community, so there may be three different sets of recommendations coming out of each school."

She also says the students themselves have been a driving force behind the committee.

"The impetus for this has come from students in all three high schools," she says. "And one of the student issues certainly is certainly the installation of condom machines in the high school."

Marsha Santerre, one of the students on the committee, says there is strong support for the idea among the student body.

"We took a poll and about 97 per cent of the students wanted condom machines in the school," says Santerre. "And of the ones who opposed

“They weren't open-minded at all. They had their opinions formed before they got there.”

them, their main concern was they they would be vandalized."

She says that she thinks the machines would be a "precaution" against things like STDs and pregnancy.

"Teenage pregnancy is so high in this town right now," she says. "There's quite a few of my friends who are pregnant."

According to the STD Clinic at the Thunder Bay District Health Unit, there were 12 reported cases of STDs in Schreiber and Terrace Bay in 1991.

"But there's probably three times that many cases—that's the rule of thumb," says Public Health Nurse Diane Britton.

"In communities like Terrace Bay and Schreiber, doctors rely more on clinical diagnoses, on the symptoms and signs the patient has. We don't have statistics on those cases."

Britton also says 85 per cent of STDs occur to people between 15 and 30 years of age.

"And the predominant group is in the late teens and early 20s category," she says. "They take the brunt of it."

Marsha Santerre says she's confident the committee will recommend installing condom machines.

"I think it will definitely go through," she says. "There are some parents who are strongly opposed to it, but there are quite a few parents who are for it."

Santerre says that parents who are strongly opposed to the idea made their views known at the committee's first meeting.

"They weren't open-minded at all," she says. "They had their opinions formed before they got there."

But she says that in her opinion, the parents who spoke at the first meeting don't just oppose condom machines.

"They're against the whole way sex education is taught," she says. "They don't want the idea of safe sex taught anymore—they want total abstinence to be taught."

Santerre says she hopes that by the end of the committee's review process, the attitude of some of those parents will change.

"We'd like them to be a bit more understanding of the fact that they can't change everything to the way they want," she says. "And maybe we can open their minds a little."

The committee is hoping to have its recommendations ready by February of 1993.

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MNDM announces modifications to small communities funding

The Ministry of Northern Development and Mines has announced modifications to its Small Communities Improvement Program (SCIP).

"In its first two years, the SCIP allowed many smaller centres in the North to fast-track projects which might otherwise have been delayed," says Martel.

"By helping to maintain or improve essential community services, this program has helped many smaller communities temper the effects of the recession on its capital spending programs."

SCIP is a capital grants program for native communities and northern municipalities

with a permanent population of up to 2,000. It provides minor capital funding for the construction or renovation of permanent installations to enhance delivery of essential services.

This year, program funding will cover up to 75 per cent of eligible costs to a maximum grant of \$35,000. As in previous years, funding will only be available for projects that are not eligible for assistance under other government grants.

To date, the program has put about \$2 million toward more than 80 projects in Northern Ontario.

KC, Chamber meet

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Draft legislation and public hearings on the matter are expected sometime in 1993.

"We've gone the political route on this, and we haven't gotten anywhere," said Grimm. "Our employees and our community are our strongest voice on this."

KC estimates it would cost between \$100 and \$150 million to convert to chlorine-free bleaching. It contends there is no demand for such a product,

and that there is no evidence that the environment would benefit.

"If the demand (for unbleached pulp) was there, we'd give it to our customer," said Grimm. "And we wouldn't need a law to get us to do it."

He said one of the results of the current debate is that it's preventing Kimberly-Clark from dealing with other issues, such as odour control.

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