

Action Group Forms in Seattle: Parents and Teachers for Responsible Schools

By Eleanor Durham

The author describes her remarkably determined and methodical campaign to protest the gay advocacy which is changing school programs in Seattle:

My husband and I are both lawyers, and the parents of a five-year-old boy. Last winter we had finally decided, with some anxiety, to enroll our son in the neighborhood school for kindergarten, instead of private school. It was just at that time that I read in the local newspaper that the school district would be placing "gay affirming" books into the libraries of the elementary schools district-wide.

The books were to be purchased with funds donated to a local homosexual advocacy organization, PRIDE, by a lesbian city council member and her partner. Among the books they wanted to see placed in the schools were "Heather's Two Mommies," "Daddy's Roommate," "Daddy's Wedding," and "Making Love Visible."

Seattle is a rather liberal city and there are lots of openly homosexual people in local government and public life. The city has statutes prohibiting sexual-orientation discrimination and providing domestic partner benefits, and last year the mayor was pictured on the front page of the local paper at the church "wedding" of a homosexual couple who worked at city hall. Every branch of government has its "Sexual Minority Advocacy Council," and probably 30% of the teaching, library, and administrative staff in the public schools are homosexual. So it was not immediately evident where to turn to for advice on how to react to this announcement.

As it turned out, there *was* no one to turn to for advice. Fortunately, when an organization in a neighboring community got its name in the papers by speaking out against the books, several people called them. This group put us all in touch with one another, and another "grassroots" activist group was born. We met with the school-district superintendent and the president of the school board and told them of our concerns. We attended school-board meetings and asked that the decision be reconsidered. We held press conferences and spoke out against the books: all to no avail.

An Issue of "Safety"

We were informed that "gay kids" are at increased risk of harassment and violence, and that the result of this was increased truancy, tardiness, and drop-out rates, increased participation in unsafe sex and drug use, and increased risk of suicide. Therefore, intervention by the District was necessary to stop the abuse and help Seattle's homosexual kids succeed in school and have good self-esteem.

The Goal: A Gay-Affirming Curriculum

In the process, we learned there was a Sexual-Minority Advocacy Council within the district that had engineered the book deal. We filed public records requests on this group, and discovered its members had been working since 1988 to bring to fruition *an entire gay-affirming curriculum for every grade level and every subject*. They were working with the King County Department of Public Health to manufacture the data necessary to justify the program (i.e. to categorize it as a "safety" issue).

We then looked into the district policies and guidelines for adopting and implementing curriculum and selecting books, and discovered that the district was not following its own procedures. In particular, it was not complying with its own *controversial-issues policy* in the presentation of information about homosexuality in the Family Living and Sexual Health programs for grades 7/8, 9/10 and 11/12.

Fighting for a Balanced Program

We determined that an effective strategy for confronting this issue was to compel the district to teach both sides of the debate concerning homosexuality—something they clearly do not want to do. I drafted the following letter (*see next page*) to request that the district implement the NARTH guidelines for the teaching of homosexuality. The other steps we have taken are:

- 1) Creating a "Parental Notification Request" form, asking that children not be exposed to information on homosexuality without obtaining parental approval;
- 2) Establishing a mailing and networking list;
- 3) Creating a donation-request form and news bulletin;
- 4) Lobbying for helpful legislation;
- 5) Putting together a speaker's bureau.

It is not easy for parents to put up this kind of fight. Everything is stacked against us. The homosexual-advocacy groups have been organizing for at least twenty years, and have been making good-sized strides in the past ten years. They have lots of money, and the media likes them better.

But even though we are a small core group of people, working in our spare time, with no money, we drive them crazy. To listen to them, you would think we were really a threat. And so we continue. This is an extremely important issue, and a fight worth waging.

But more of us must get involved—and soon—before we actually *lose the right to dissent* on this issue. ■