

Cozad Community Schools

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March 31, 2021

State Board of Education
Nebraska Department of Education
% Ryan Floor
P.O. Box 94987, Lincoln, NE 68509-4987

Re: Public Comment Regarding the Draft Nebraska Health Standards

Dear Members of the State Board of Education:

I write on behalf of the Board of Education of Cozad Community Schools. At the outset, I want to thank the State Board of Education, Commissioner Blomstedt, and the Department of Education for supporting our schools during the last year by developing guidance through the involvement of stakeholders across the state, encouraging local control, and affording schools the flexibility necessary to continue educating students in the most effective manners available. This approach proved to be one of the most effective in the country; our school district was able to maintain in-person instruction uninterrupted throughout the entire school year. Indeed, our state has long benefited from a focus on local control that promotes community involvement and investment in policy and decision making. That is why our board was so troubled by the recently promulgated draft Nebraska Health Standards, and why I am writing to address some of our concerns with the contents of these Standards.

While we recognize the importance of health education as a part of any student's public school experience, the draft Standards for this area highlight issues which are incompatible with a uniform approach established at the state level. For instance, the proposal includes Standards providing for:

- Kindergarten students to learn the fundamental components of sexual health (HE.K.7.1)
- Kindergarten students to learn characteristics relating to sexuality (HE.K.7.2)
- Kindergarten students to discuss different kinds of family structures, including single parent, blended, intergenerational, cohabitating, adoptive, foster, same-gender, and interracial (HE.K.7.2a)
- First grade students to learn the fundamental components of sexual health (HE.1.7.1)
- First grade students to define gender, gender identity, and gender-role stereotypes (HE.1.7.2.d)
- Second grade students to discuss how media influences thoughts, feelings, and beliefs, including bias, perceptions, social norms, spirituality and gender roles (HE.2.6.4.b)
- Second grade students to recognize genitalia differences (HE.2.7.1.a)
- Third grade students to discuss stereotypes and racial bias in media and books (e.g. heros, "bad guys", characteristics, roles) (HE.3.6.4.d)
- Third grade students to discuss the range of ways people express their gender and how gender-role stereotypes may influence behavior (HE.3.7.2.c)
- Third grade students to define sexual orientation (HE.3.7.2.e)
- Fourth grade students to differentiate between sexual orientation and gender identity (HE.4.7.2.d)
- Fourth grade students to distinguish between sex assigned at birth and gender identity and explain how they may or may not differ (HE.4.7.2.f)
- Fifth grade students to explain how culture, media, and other factors influence perceptions about body image, gender roles, and attractiveness (HE.5.7.1.c)
- Fifth grade students to describe the benefits of being sexually abstinent (HE.5.7.1.f)
- Fifth grade students to explain that gender expression and gender identity exist along a spectrum (HE.5.7.2.f)
- Fifth grade students to explain the significance of the physical changes in puberty and the potential role of hormone blockers on young people who identify as transgender (HE.5.7.3.e)

- Sixth grade students to define and explain differences between cisgender, transgender, gender non-binary, gender expansive, and gender identity (HE.6.7.2.b)
- Sixth grade students to define sexual identity and explain a range of identities related to sexual orientation including heterosexual, bisexual, lesbian, gay, queer, two-spirit, asexual, pansexual (HE.6.7.2.c)
- Sixth grade students to discuss the ways people express their gender and how gender-role stereotypes may limit behavior (HE.6.7.2.f)
- Seventh grade students to define vaginal, oral and anal sex and their relationship to STD/HIV transmission (HE.7.7.1.e)
- Eighth grade students to develop a plan to eliminate or reduce risk of unintended pregnancy and STDs, including HIV (HE.8.7.1.e)
- Eighth grade students to assess the role hormones play in the physical, social, cognitive, and emotional changes during adolescence, including among people who are intersex and transgender (HE.8.7.3.a)

Each of these topics should be addressed with students in a manner consistent with the values of their families and communities at the time in their development that it is appropriate to do so. These are discussions and decisions that would and should vary from family to family and school district to school district if they are to be had honestly, productively, and in good faith.

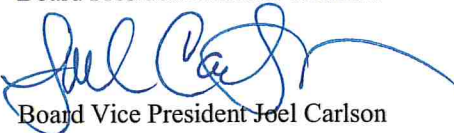
I am concerned that the Board would be putting a spotlight on any school or community's variance of discussion of or introduction to these issues if it approves the proposed standards in their current form. While such standards outside the core curriculum are not binding on a district, they express and establish expectations from the State Board that inevitably will be imposed upon schools irrespective of their advisory nature and sensitive subject matter. The State Board would be asking each school district to account for the State Board's decision and answer to groups of various interests and opinions as they question any adherence to, or divergence from, the proposed Standards.

As a result, the proposed Standards would undermine the buy-in of local citizens and their school boards in making curricular decisions consistent with community values. I am also concerned that such expectations would devolve into another unfunded mandate imposed upon public school districts and their communities during a time of fiscal uncertainty and operational adversity. That the proposed standards do not reflect or defer to the judgment of the leaders of our families and communities is the result of a development process that focused on a top-down approach and failed to consider the input of all stakeholders. I would respectfully request that the State Board consider our concerns and the input of other stakeholders who were left out of this process prior to approving or adopting any standards related to these sensitive issues.

Yours very truly,



Board President Michele Starman



Board Vice President Joel Carlson



Board Member Kiley Goff



Board Member John Peden



Board Secretary Ann Burkholder



Board Member Judy Eggleston



Superintendent Ron Wymore