

Lynn Koller

From: Lynn Koller [lynn@cosmicscribbler.com]
Sent: Monday, June 02, 2008 6:55 PM
To: 'Paranzino, Barbara A.'
Cc: 'mlsawyer@volusia.k12.fl.us'; 'jklane@volusia.k12.fl.us'
Subject: Virginty Vows in the 5th Grade

Ms. Paranzino-

I was rather stunned to learn that Pine Trail and other Volusia elementary schools have 5th graders raise their right hands and take vows of virginity-until-marriage after their health/sex education talk. It seems outrageous that anyone would ask a 10-year-old, who has only an immature understanding of sex and marriage at best, to vow to remain abstinent until after he or she is married.

Research shows that teenagers who take virginity vows break them more often than not. I don't even know of research on 10-year-olds making such promises, but I do know that unless the speakers are clearly defining the concepts of abstinence, virginity, marriage, intercourse, and/or sex specifically for an audience of elementary age children, taking virginity vows will likely confuse the children and mean nothing in terms of reducing teenage sexual activity, unwanted pregnancy, and STDs (if that is in fact the goal). Are the speakers teaching the children that abstinence refers solely to vaginal or anal intercourse? What constitutes sex? Does abstinence refer to other forms of sexual activity like oral sex and genital touching? Is marriage defined as a long-term commitment or must it be a legal arrangement as well? What about gender and sexuality issues that preclude marriage for some people? I am not suggesting that these speakers should broach such issues with 5th graders - which makes it all the more perplexing that the children are asked to take these solemn virginity vows.

I've researched this issue and have outlined my argument against abstinence-only programs in Volusia County middle and high schools in a recent News-Journal article (<http://www.news-journalonline.com/NewsJournalOnline/Opinion/Editorials/opnOPN43052208.htm>). The program I oppose ran a rebuttal piece as well (<http://www.news-journalonline.com/NewsJournalOnline/Opinion/Editorials/opnOPN18053008.htm>). I am not promoting casual sex or teenage sex and would like to see comprehensive sex education programs in place in middle and high schools that reduce teenage pregnancy and STDs. It just so happens that virginity vows do not accomplish that goal, but instead promote a kind of reductive logic that undermines providing students with a useful understanding of human sexuality.

I'm asking that Pine Trail stop the practice of having 5th graders take virginity vows. Could you let me know what to do to accomplish that? I've sent a copy of this email to Pine Trail parents so that they may voice their opinions on this issue as well.

Lynn

Lynn Koller
Ormond Beach, Florida
386.682.6355
Lynn@CosmicScribbler.com
www.CosmicScribbler.com

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From: Lynn Koller [lynn@cosmicscribbler.com]
Sent: Wednesday, June 04, 2008 12:24 PM
To: 'PineTrailParents@cosmicscribbler.com'
Cc: 'bparanzi@volusia.k12.fl.us'; 'mlsawyer@volusia.k12.fl.us'; 'jklane@volusia.k12.fl.us'; 'tnclem@volusia.k12.fl.us'; 'Margaret Smith (masmith1@volusia.k12.fl.us)'
Subject: Virginty Vows for Girls Only

Pine Trails parents--

I just wanted to let you know that only the 5th grade girls are asked to take the virginity-until-marriage vows. Not the boys. It is my understanding that this practice has gone on for years, and I am asking that it be stopped immediately. No 5th grader, regardless of gender, should be asked to take a virginity vow after a one-hour talk about the physical changes brought on by puberty.

A note on this issue: I think it's admirable and appropriate that the school addresses puberty and body changes with the students. At our school, Dr. Rodriguez, a pediatrician, and Trudy Clem, a nurse, give these talks to the boys and girls. While parents should certainly talk to their kids about health and sexuality issues, I think it's beneficial for children to receive this information from another qualified source as well. I admit that I don't know everything there is to know about puberty and sexuality and have no objection to this instruction in principle. At this time, I'm only addressing the virginity vows. It is my understanding that our school could simply stop doing it if the parents object. So I'm asking you to object. (You might also ask why the girls are instructed to be chaste, whereas the boys are not. That seems like a question worth addressing.)

If you would like to voice your opinion on this matter, please contact Barbara Paranzino, principal; Marybeth Sawyer, vice principal; Janice Kane, school nurse; and Trudy Clem, nursing supervisor for Volusia County. You may cut and paste these addresses into your email program:

bparanzi@volusia.k12.fl.us; mlsawyer@volusia.k12.fl.us; jklane@volusia.k12.fl.us; tnclem@volusia.k12.fl.us

Thank you to all of those who've supported this effort. I am happy to hear from you and hope that you're contacting school officials as well.

Lynn

Lynn Koller
Ormond Beach, Florida
Main 386.682.6355
Lynn@CosmicScribbler.com
www.CosmicScribbler.com

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From: Lynn Koller [lynn@cosmicscribbler.com]
Sent: Wednesday, June 04, 2008 6:58 PM
To: 'PineTrailParents@cosmicscribbler.com'
Cc: Barbara Paranzino (bparanzi@mail.volusia.k12.fl.us); 'mlsawyer@volusia.k12.fl.us'; 'jklane@volusia.k12.fl.us'
Subject: Thank You - No More Virginity Vows for 5th Grade Girls (or Boys)

To the Pine Trails parents & more—

Thank you for your many responses in support of eliminating virginity vows for girls at Pine Trail. This was actually a county-wide practice. As of this afternoon, Volusia County school administrators have decided to eliminate the vow as a component of the 5th grade health talk about puberty. I'd like to thank our vice principal, Marybeth Sawyer, for an incredibly rapid response to this issue. She evaluated the "Changes" curriculum and contacted the school officials in charge of administering the program so that it might be re-considered, which it was very quickly.

Avowedly,
Lynn Koller