

## **New York City HIV/AIDS Education Mandate**

On February 27, 1991 the New York City Board of Education held an historic vote in favor of a bold new plan for an "Expanded HIV/AIDS Education Including Condom Availability Program" for public high school students in grades 9-12. The intent of the plan was and is to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS and encourage students to abstain from high risk behavior, including sexual intercourse and substance abuse. The requirements of the plan are often referred to as New York City's AIDS Education Mandate.

### **The Mandate Requires That Every NYC Public High School:**

1. Form an HIV/AIDS Education Team. This team must include, at a minimum, at least one parent, student, staff member from the Health Resource Room, teacher, principal, and assistant principal. The role of the HIV/AIDS Team is to help plan how AIDS education is provided in the school. This means team members review AIDS educational materials to ensure that they are both appropriate and useful. They also enlist the help of outside agencies to assist in school efforts to provide effective, high-quality AIDS education to students. When students need counseling or other services—for instance, bereavement counseling when a friend or family member dies of AIDS complications—it is the HIV/AIDS Team that identifies and arranges for these services, which are often provided right at the school.
2. Teach six AIDS education lessons at each grade level. In accordance with state regulations, these lessons must address the nature, transmission and prevention of the disease; stress abstinence as the most effective way to prevent sexual transmission of HIV; and inform parents of their right to withdraw their child or children from specific lessons that cover methods of prevention.
3. Create a Health Resource Room where information on sexually transmitted diseases and other health issues, including AIDS, is available to students. The Health Resource Room should offer privacy and make condoms available to students who request them.
4. Staff the Health Resource Room during the day for at least ten periods each week. One female and one male volunteer must be present at all times to make condoms available.
5. Evaluate how well its AIDS Education Program is operating, and the ways in which it could be improved.
6. Provide an AIDS information training session for parents every year.

Note: On January 11, 1994, parents were given the right to remove their children from condom availability in the schools. Taking this step does not preclude a student's participation in the educational component of the program—only from the condom availability component.

### **HIV/AIDS Education Teams**

In every public high school in New York City, a group of dedicated volunteers oversees the HIV/AIDS education that goes on in that school. This group is referred to as the HIV/AIDS Education Team. Though teams can be large, each is composed of, at a minimum: a teacher, a parent, a student, and an assistant principal. One of these individuals is designated as the Team Leader. One of the most vital skills for HIV/AIDS Teams is team-building. Through respecting the abilities of each group member and allowing each person to bring new skills and strengths to the group, teams become stronger and more effective. Team-members need information. It's helpful to know about the AIDS Education Mandate, and how to contact their Comprehensive Health Coordinators and obtain condoms for the Health Resource Room.

### **A Note on Condoms and Condom Demonstrations...**

Team members should be aware that, although classroom condom demonstrations were banned by the Chancellor in 1995, condoms and condom demonstrations are available in each school's Health Resource Room.

### **HIV/AIDS Curriculum**

In 2005, the New York City Department of Education released the *HIV/AIDS Curriculum: A Supplement to a 12th grade*. Team members can obtain a copy of the curriculum, as well as a list of approved HIV/AIDS educational materials, from their school principal or the Department of Education.

### **Comprehensive Health Coordinators**

A Comprehensive Health Coordinator, or CHC, from the Division of Student Support Services, works with the superintendency's health liaison, school principal, and team leader to ensure implementation of the HIV/AIDS education program. CHCs can lend support, coordinate training and technical assistance, provide condoms for Health Resource Rooms, and help obtain school and community resources.

### **Health Resource Rooms**

Every public high school in New York City is mandated to create a Health Resource Room where information on sexually transmitted diseases and other health issues, including AIDS, is made available to students. The Health Resource Room should be an area that offers privacy and where condoms can be issued to students who request them. Trained staff volunteers can and should provide demonstrations of effective condom use in the Health Resource Room. The Health Resource Room must be staffed at least ten periods a week at a variety of times during the school day. Whenever the Health Resource Room is open, it must be staffed by one male and one female staff person. It's a good idea to have male staff members talk to male students and female staff members talk to female students because it is not always easy for students to express their needs and concerns to someone of the opposite sex. Same-sex counseling lessens the likelihood of needless embarrassment for a student who visits the Health Resource Room.

## **Gather your team together, identify team strengths, and look into teambuilding activities**

Every public high school in NYC is required to have an HIV/AIDS Education Team. At a minimum, the team consists of an assistant principal, a teacher, a parent and a student. Teams can be much larger, of course. Students should be included in the process of creating a Health Resource Room.

## **Establish and publicize your Health Resource Room**

A great way to build enthusiasm for the Health Resource Room is to include students in the planning process and schedule a group activity around the opening of the room (see next suggestion also). Creating flyers, posters and slogans to support the room can be a group activity for students and teachers alike. These activities familiarize students with the Health Resource Room while allowing them to play an important role in its creation. Many schools have had success holding a contest among students to create a poster announcing the school's Health Resource Room, to draw up flyers to distribute at the school, or to create slogans for the walls of the room.

## **Opening of the Health Resource Room**

The opening of a Health Resource Room can be made into a festive event for the whole school. Distribute flyers throughout the school to announce the opening, perhaps as part of an AIDS education week-long or all-day event. Treat the event like the gala opening of an art show. Students and teachers can come and look around, just as they'd visit an art gallery. They can view student artwork, flyers, magazines or other materials your team has assembled in the room. Refreshments such as juice, milk and cookies can be made available. The goal is to make the room into a safe, familiar, known quantity to the students, making a later visit by a student in need much more possible.

## **Health Resource Room Location**

There are two schools of thought on HRR location. One says to locate the room in a well-traveled area so students are aware of the HRR and know where to find it. Another says students may be embarrassed to visit the room if it's in plain sight of teachers and other students. Taking both views into account, discuss the location possibilities with your team and include students in this process. Whatever your decision, remember that the room must offer privacy and a solid guarantee of confidentiality. Dealing with adolescent HIV/AIDS means dealing with students sensitively. To come to grip with HIV/AIDS, many students must address their own fears about sex, drugs, and death and dying. For a large segment of students, the loss of a family member or other loved one to HIV/AIDS further complicates the issues. Try to keep these possibilities in mind. Consider the likelihood that students may be embarrassed on their first visit to the Health Resource Room. Remember, sex is an emotionally charged concept to adolescents. The room must afford a private area where students can have an opportunity to consult with a caring, competent staff member—of the same sex—in a confidential manner.

## **Identify Resources**

1. Community Resources - A list of community-based resources should be available in your Health Resource Room.

2. Printed Materials - The Health Resource Room should contain a wide variety of materials offering information on HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases, teen pregnancy, and other health issues of concern to young people. Printed materials, video products and posters are among the items typically contained in a Health Resource Room.
  
3. The HIV/AIDS Materials Review Committee - The New York City Department of Education's HIV/AIDS Materials Review Committee has approved a large number of educational materials for use in Health Resource Rooms. Call your Comprehensive Health Coordinator (CHC) or your school's Health Liaison for a list of approved materials. Brochures, pamphlets and other written materials can be obtained for free from the NYS Department of Health.
  
4. Comprehensive Health Coordinator - A Comprehensive Health Coordinator, or CHC, from the Division of Student Support Services, works with your superintendency's health liaison, school principal, and team leader to ensure implementation of the HIV/AIDS education program. CHCs can lend support, coordinate training and technical assistance, provide condoms for Health Resource Rooms, and help you to use school and community resources.