

How District 211 candidates view newly revised sex ed curriculum

By Eric Peterson | March 3, 2023

Palatine-Schaumburg High School District 211's controversial adoption of the state's revised sex education curriculum last November remains a point of criticism from some in the community and a matter of debate among the 11 candidates running for the board.

Incumbents Kimberly Cavill, Mark Cramer, Peter Dombrowski and Steven Rosenblum are on the April 4 ballot, along with challengers Michelle Barron, Aiden Branss, Meenal Dewal, Jane Russell, Susan Saam, Joan Sherrill and Barbara Velez. Four seats are at stake.



The state's non-mandatory sex ed curriculum was revised this year to add the topics of sexual orientation and gender identity. Those subjects will be covered in April as part of District 211's freshman and sophomore health and wellness classes. Students have the option to opt out.

Branss, a 2022 Palatine High School graduate, said he's in favor of the revised curriculum and believes only some parents — those he believes dislike gay people — have a problem with it. He specifically disagreed with a statement Saam made at a candidates forum in January arguing that the curriculum would create hypersexualized students.

Saam responded Branss might have a different perspective with more life experience. She also criticized the lack of detail the superintendent offered on the night the classes were approved, and she called out Rosenblum for supporting the curriculum despite the community members' opposition.

Rosenblum said that like many, he was taught sex ed in school. He added that times change and education needs to adapt and respond to what's happening in the world today.

Dombrowski, who voted against the curriculum, disputed Branss' assertion that only parents oppose it. He said his son has asked to opt out of the classes, adding that some people are finding themselves increasingly isolated based on their views.

Dewan said she believes such a curriculum is crucial to keeping students safe and healthy when there is easy access to sexual imagery and information elsewhere. A native of India, she said she understands that residents of the district come from diverse cultural backgrounds, but believes such concerns are addressed by the ability to opt out of the classes.

Sherrill said she doesn't find the changes to the curriculum that significant, and that not every student comes from a home where parents are comfortable sharing such information. She said the classroom is a better venue than social media for such instruction. She's opted her own kids out of lessons she thought they weren't ready for when they were younger and sees that as a legitimate option for some.

Barron also doesn't find the current curriculum that different from what she was taught at Hoffman Estates High School years ago. She said the lessons prevent violence and provide necessary life skills, such as acknowledging members of the LGBTQ community as part of society.

Cavill, a former sex ed teacher, said she fully supports the curriculum and believes there is misinformation about it that has been spread in the community. She called sex education invaluable in a world where the rates of sexual violence are increasing.

Velez, who works with multilingual families in Schaumburg Township Elementary District 54, thought the wellness curriculum was good before, but that the curriculum decision was rushed and based on vague information. She remains concerned about how the lessons will be taught to 15-year-olds and thinks a limited pilot program might have been a more careful first step.

Russell said she believes any impression of the process being rushed may have more to do with the way the change was approved by the state. The ability of parents to opt out addresses any concerns there might be, she added.

Cramer joined Dombrowski in voting against the curriculum and remains apprehensive that the ability to opt out will remain in place. Cramer said he has been concerned about the lack of detail about how the classes will be taught since November, and he believes the rollout of the curriculum next month will be telling about its future. ■



P.O. Box 876 | Tinley Park, IL 60477

708-781-9328 | ContactUs@illinoisfamily.org | illinoisfamily.org