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Maintain abstinence focus

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BY The Post and Courier Editorial Staff

The director of the sexual education program at Charleston County schools may be gone, but the district's focus on abstinence shouldn't go with her. Students should be taught in the strongest terms possible that contraception doesn't solve the problems created by teen-age sexual activity.

Clearly, some in the school district believed that Anne Badgley's Heritage Community Service program emphasized abstinence outside marriage to the exclusion of adequate instruction on contraception. If that was the case, it could have been resolved short of her termination.

But the district must be committed to an instructional program on sex ed that has abstinence as its focus, recognizing that abstinence offers the safest assurance against unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. An abstinence-based program also is required by state law.

Mrs. Badgley's termination was couched in terms of the district's need for a full-time, and presumably salaried, sex-ed director. But there were earlier reports that her attempts to implement the Heritage program were strongly resisted by some district officials, and it is by no means certain that the district ever dealt with the administrative stumbling blocks that Mrs. Badgley faced.

It is rather ironic to consider Superintendent Ron McWhirt's comments about the need for staff development on sex ed, when one of his subordinates admittedly refused to provide Mrs. Badgley with information needed to deal with curriculum and staff development,

If Mrs. Badgley was set up for failure by her critics, they apparently succeeded in their goal. Nevertheless, Dr. McWhirt, who removed her from the job, insists that the Heritage program remains an option for district schools that want it.

Meanwhile, School Board Chairman Liz Alston promises to make sure that the district's sex ed program doesn't stray from a focus on abstinence.

"I'm not going to micromanage, but I am going to make sure the educational requirements are being addressed," she said. "I have been assured that the abstinence message will get out."

Contraception is an essential part of any sex-ed program, and while state law requires instruction on it be offered in the context of family planning, students can make of it what they will.

But the presumption that many teens are going to be sexually active doesn't negate the importance of offering a program that might deter sexual activity, for the medical and emotional well-being of young people. Students should be made fully aware of the less glamorous consequences of sexual activity, one being that condoms don't offer a safeguard against pregnancy or sexually transmitted disease in every instance.

Right decision on Vieques

Nobody questions the importance of the U.S. Navy's base and bombing range on the Puerto Rican island of Vieques. It plays a central role in the Navy's training process and is the only place for ships and aircraft to prepare and practice for combat so thoroughly. What is now questioned is whether, after more than half a century of sharing their island with the Navy, the people of Vieques have had enough.

The governments of the United States and Puerto Rico, with the Navy, have come up with the best way to find out. The decision will be made by the people of Vieques in a referendum that may be held as early as August this year, but must be carried out by February 2002.

Judging by the protests organized to deny the Navy access to Vieques, and the occupation of the bombing and firing range by demonstrators, which prevented war games for a year, there will be a massive vote by the 9,300 residents to evict the Navy. That is exactly what Puerto Rico's Gov. Pedro Rosello predicts. "I think the outcome of the referendum will be one that will support in a very solid manner the termination of the presence of the Navy in Vieques," he told The Associated Press. Gov. Rosello said that while he favors the Navy's departure from Vieques, the government will not launch a campaign against the Navy's presence. "This is a decision that has to come from the people of Vieques," he said.

The Navy doesn't agree with the governor's prediction. Rear Adm. Kevin Green, head of the Navy's Southern Command, believes that the people of Vieques will vote to keep the base. "Their best future lies with the continued relationship with the U.S. Navy," he said. "It isn't always the loudest voices that carry the day. It isn't always the people who are always in the public eye who really represent the wishes, aspiration and desires of a community."

The occupation of the range was led by political activists, including the leader of the Puerto Rican independence movement. Until an accident in April last year, when two

bombs went astray, killing a Puerto Rican security guard in a watch tower at the range, residents of the otherwise tranquil island not only accepted the Navy but also its use of live ammunition.

Following the forced removal of protesters, some of whom had camped out on the range for months, training has resumed, but with dummy bombs. Protesters have unsuccessfully tried to re-enter the range to prevent it being used.

Adm. Green has described the protests as "an entirely futile and unhelpful approach to dealing with the political issue." The Navy has offered to create training programs and bring high technology companies to the island if the people vote to allow the Navy to remain. The U.S. government has also offered to invest in the island's infrastructure if the referendum favors the Navy.

Weighing the scales against a "yes" vote are charges that the picturesque island's environment has been harmed by the Navy and that, according to the local health department, the island's cancer rate is some 20 percent higher than the Puerto Rican average. The Navy disputes both claims.

The time slot allocated for the referendum provides islanders an opportunity to get the facts and make up their minds, based on their own research, not what they are told by outsiders. It is their island and their future.

Who knows? It may turn out that the Navy is, as Adm. Green believes, more in tune with the wishes and aspirations of the people of Vieques than those who have been raising their voices to demand that the Navy ship out.

Loaded evidence

Modern dogma stubbornly persists in minimizing the fundamental, irrevocable distinctions between the female and male of the human species.

Modern life continues to debunk such minimization. For instance, a renowned dishwasher-loading expert tells *The Wall Street Journal* that women and men exhibit significantly divergent trends in performing that household chore.

Sandra C. Steward of Whirlpool Corp. explains that women generally place dishes in the washer with a gentle, balanced touch, carefully arranging them in a predetermined order. Men, conversely, generally toss the dishes into the washer with little or no design in mind, according to Ms. Steward, at times unintentionally instigating domestic disputes with wives who find their haphazard tactics offensive.

So add the dishwasher to the automobile and the television remote control among the contemporary gadgets that reveal what attentive folks should already know:

Males and females are very different sorts of people.