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An Ethical Dispute

August 17, 2005
James Osborne
The Monitor

Mission residents face off on sex education

Mission residents clashed at a town hall meeting Tuesday night over whether "safe sex" films have a place in the school district's curriculum.

A local community group is pushing for more speakers and films promoting abstinence over "safe sex," tactics students and parents call unrealistic. Texas already mandates an abstinence-based program that also discusses the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancy.

Controversy first arose earlier this year, when Mission High School began showing the film Toothpaste, which four Mission High students wrote and a New York City nonprofit, Scenarios USA, produced. The film, which is scheduled to start running on Showtime in May, tells the story of two teenage girls in the process of deciding whether to have sex with their boyfriends — one opts yes and the other no. The students substitute the word "toothpaste" for "condoms."

Shannon San Miguel, who leads the pro-abstinence group and co-coordinated



Belia Alvarez, standing, a 43-year Mission resident, voices her opinion Tuesday night at the First Baptist Church in Mission during a community gathering regarding sex education in schools.

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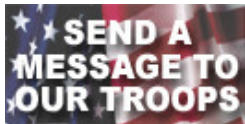
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Tuesday's meeting at First Baptist Church, doesn't believe the film has a place in the school district.

"There's only two weeks of sex education being taught, and I don't think (the film) has an educational value," she said.

San Miguel has been organizing sex-education meetings at various churches around the city to rally support. But she met resistance Tuesday when approximately 60 residents showed up to speak out against what they perceive as the group's intent to ban "safe sex" lessons from the curriculum all together.

"If you're going to show something to the students, don't go half way," said Lucero Gimello, founder of the United Youth Council. "If you talk to kids who are sexually active, and you show them (abstinence-only videos) they're just going to blow it off."

San Miguel, for her part, said her group was not against "safe sex" education all together, simply in a limited role. Part of the controversy surrounds the demographics of San Miguel's group.

"They're rich and upper class," said resident Irma Flores. "I applaud everyone's effort, but we don't all live on the rich side of Mission. Things are different over here."

While the meeting grew tense at times, one point everyone could agree on is sex education within the school district needs to be improved. Superintendent Oscar Rodriguez said all students are required to take two weeks of sex education as a part of their health requirement, but numerous students stood up at the meeting to criticize the lessons as inadequate.

"In my freshman biology class, we had one day, and that was just anatomy," Gimello said. "And in health class, it was in the text book, but we just skipped over it. I think a lot of the teachers are uncomfortable talking about it, like a lot of parents are."

James Osborne covers PSJA and general assignments for The Monitor. You can reach him at (956) 683-4428.

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