

October 19, 2007

Dear Parents,

I wanted to write you a quick note to address the swirl of controversy surrounding King Middle School's Health Center. There is an amount of misinformation out in the national media that I would like to clarify for our families. Here is our logic:

1. Teen pregnancy is a life-changing event with many negative results. There have been 17 pregnancies among Portland Middle Schools in the last 4 years.
2. Some of our students only access health care through the King Student Health Center operated by the City of Portland's Public Health Division.
3. Five students who were aged 14 & 15 self reported risky sexual behavior at the Health Center last year resulting in one full-term pregnancy.
4. To prevent pregnancy the Health Center needs to have contraception as an option when a student admits being sexually active. Contraception would only be prescribed in rare cases after counseling about abstinence and postponing sexual behavior was not productive. Every effort is always made to encourage the student to join with her parents in making this decision.
5. There is also counseling to determine if this is a case of abuse or coercion. In this case proper authorities would be informed.
6. If the student does not wish to inform their parent – the doctor is required by Maine State Law to keep the diagnosis confidential. This is also the case if a private physician treats a student.
7. Our goal is to equalize access to health care for our students who use the Health Center as their primary source of health care. This gives the doctor the full range of options to prevent teen pregnancy.

I hope this logic makes sense to you and helps you understand our thinking. King is a great school dedicated to the learning, health and safety of all of our kids. This change is another tool to support our students albeit a very small minority.

I have talked with a number of parents and I know one positive outcome of this controversy is that parents and teens have (in some cases for the first time) had a discussion about sexual activity. I suspect this also may be discussed in homes beyond King Middle School.

The media frenzy is calming at least as it touches King. While all of this has been happening school has proceeded smoothly and effectively. This is a credit to the great kids and staff at King.

Have a great weekend.

Sincerely,

Michael J. McCarthy
Principal