

Board hears video debate

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Burlington County Times

EVESHAM — Some 200 people turned out in last night's icy rain to discuss whether a video that shows gay and lesbian parents is appropriate for viewing by the township's third-grade students.



The Board of Education had estimated that the meeting at the Francis S. DeMasi School would draw hundreds more.

Those who braved the weather included Molly Patnic of Wayne, Pa., who made the two-hour trip to Evesham with her two sons because, she said, the controversy is about families just like hers.

"I am a lesbian with children, and we are a family just like any other family. I wanted to come out and show people that we are no different than anyone else. We have the same issues, including fighting over doing homework and who is going to do the dishes," she said.

School district administrators pulled the "That's A Family!" video from the third-grade health curriculum last Friday. The 35-minute documentary upset some parents and community members because it shows families headed by same-sex couples.

After it was shown to third-graders at the J. Harold Van Zant School in December, a family complained about the content of the video to the media, setting off a heated debate in the community and drawing national media attention.

In addition to township residents, representatives from various area church groups, San Francisco-based Women's Educational Media, which produced the video, and Garden State Equality, a gay-rights advocacy group, attended last night's meeting.

Evesham resident Jim McTear, the township's baseball league commissioner, called the controversy and the attention it has garnered "ridiculous."

"This is a Marlton issue and should be handled between the parents and the school board to determine what is best for our schools," he said last night.

Howard Stone, parent of an Evesham kindergarten student, opposes the showing of the video to the third-graders. "They are too young to be shown what is being shown. Instead of pushing an agenda, they just need to teach tolerance and the Golden Rule," he said

Stone said the district's decision to pull the video was a "step in the right direction — parents' voices were heard."

Another parent, however, felt her voice wasn't heard. "I believe you were bullied by intolerant people...I want to urge you to restore the video," she said about the decision to pull the video.

Many in the large contingent from Garden State Equality, which has publicly supported the district's showing of the video, carried signs reading, "Thank you for teaching diversity. It affects us all."

The district has said it will convene a special review committee to consider the appropriateness and the future use of the video in the township schools. A recommendation is expected by September 2007.

A survey of third-grade parents earlier this month indicated that 50.4 percent wished their children to view the video, and 49.5 percent wanted their children excused. The district has 544 third-graders at its seven elementary schools. Ninety percent of the parents responded to the survey.