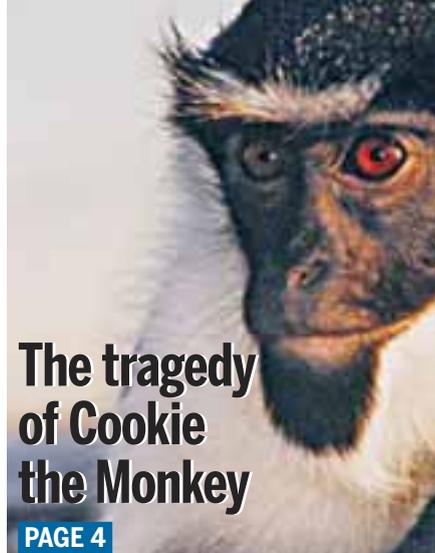




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SEX ED IN SCHOOLS:

How young is too young?

City schools don't have to teach it, but teens say they should

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(iStockphoto)



SHOULD MIDDLE SCHOOLS TEACH SEX ED?
A YES B NO

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TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2007

Briefs

■ **MTA shortfall less than earlier predicted**
MTA officials said yesterday that the agency faces a 3.85 percent shortfall, instead of the 6.5 percent that had been previously reported. A spokesman for the MTA declined to state exactly how much subway and bus fares would rise as a result, but since Spitzer has already said that base fares will remain \$2, it is expected that unlimited use MetroCard costs will rise slightly. (amNY)

■ **Talks continue in Broadway dispute**
Negotiators for both sides in the Broadway labor dispute were back at the table last night, after a marathon session that had lasted into the morning rush hour yesterday. Talks between the League of American Theatres and Producers and Local 1, the union representing stagehands, resumed last night at 7 p.m., after a 12-hour adjournment. Discussions resumed Sunday after a one-week layoff. (Newsday)

■ **LaGuardia flights delayed three hours**
The long Thanksgiving weekend got a bit longer yesterday for travelers at LaGuardia Airport who saw their flights delayed by an average of three hours because of rain and poor visibility. According to the Federal Aviation Administration, there were also two-hour delays on arrivals at Newark Liberty Airport and one-hour delays at Kennedy Airport, on average. (AP)

■ **Fired radio DJ to return to airwaves**
A hip-hop disc jockey who was fired for making threatening racial and sexual remarks about a rival's wife and 4-year-old daughter will return to the FM airwaves, a public relations firm said yesterday. DJ Star, whose real name is Troi Torain, will co-host a morning show on a city FM station, said spokesman Bryan Pierce. The name of the station will be disclosed tomorrow. (AP)

■ **Library acquires historian's documents**
The New York Public Library has acquired the papers of acclaimed historian Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., a trove of documents including journal pages, sound recordings and correspondence, the library announced yesterday. The correspondence includes letters between Schlesinger and notables including Truman Capote, Lauren Bacall, Ralph Nader and Bill Clinton. (AP)

Teens: Let's talk about sex

Give us birds and bees, students say

By Justin Rocket Silverman
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Public schools aren't required to offer sex education, but a group of young students is calling on the city today to mandate such courses as early as middle school.

"It's as important as our other classes," said Jennifer Jones, 14, a ninth-grader at the Manhattan Center school in Harlem. "Sex ed helps us to know about our bodies. Our bodies are us, and if we don't know how to take care of them we could die."

After months of circulating petitions and lobbying school officials, Jones and nine other students will address the City Council today to make sex ed mandatory in all of the city's public middle and high schools. The teenagers got their mission rolling while they were students last year at PS/MS 218 in the Bronx. They launched a Web site and MySpace page devoted to the issue. At the time they were getting no sex education at the school, they say.

The students will offer startling numbers to support their cause: Almost half of the city's ninth graders report they are sexually active, and nearly one in 10 girls become pregnant before they are 20, according to Department of Health figures.

The Department of Education approved new standards for sex ed last month,



Yanilisa Frias, Chanell Joseph and Jennifer Jones, all 14, are among 10 students who circulated petitions and lobbied for the city to make sex education mandatory in public schools. (Michael Casker)

Lesson plan

In October, the Department of Education approved "Reducing the Risk," a new sex ed curriculum for schools available at the discretion of principals. The lessons include:

- Abstinence as an effective tool for preventing STDs and pregnancy.
- Tactics for delaying or refusing sex outright.

- How to avoid high-risk situations.
- Acquiring and using protection like condoms for safer sex.
- A vocabulary for discussing sex and protection with peers and adults.
- HIV risk behaviors.
- A detailed look at the effectiveness of condoms.

but no public schools — even high schools — in New York City must teach it. The department says it does not track how many schools opt to offer such courses.

"There has been no mandatory sex education in New York City public schools for as long as anyone can remember," said Nancy Biberman, president

of The Women's Housing and Economic Development Corp., an anti-poverty group in the Bronx. "This is such an obvious thing to pay attention to, and it's a lot more important than reading and math scores when it comes to determining who is going to drop out of school."

The first time most city

school students hear the word "sex" from a teacher is during a fourth-grade HIV prevention curriculum on puberty and development.

Yet outside of HIV prevention, lessons on birth control and sexual health are encouraged but not required, said Maibe Gonzalez Fuentes, a Department of Education spokeswoman.

"You could walk into one school that has an amazing sex ed program going from K-12, and another school that has no program at all," said Samantha Levine, the director of communication for Planned Parenthood. "Sexuality is a life-long process, and it's important to start talking to kids as early as possible."

word on the street

What New Yorkers say about: **Sex ed in schools**

» "The minute kids become aware of their sexuality they should be spoken to about it. It needs to be spoken about in schools, especially if parents aren't talking about it."

Lorraine Helliet, 37, Brooklyn

» "Twelve. I figure that by that age that if you haven't heard about sex from somebody, you're living under a rock. I'd probably teach my kids when they're around 10 because I wouldn't want them to hear it from someone else."

Chris Miraglia, 33, Brooklyn

» "Before adolescence it should be parents teaching it; after adolescence, schools. It needs to be age-appropriate."

A.M.Z. Cheverest, 48, Lower East Side (Victoria McLaughlin)

Rest of nation avoiding the issue

Although the 10 young women testifying at City Hall today might help bring sex ed to more students here, nationwide the trend has fewer young people learning how to prevent pregnancy and reduce the risk of disease.

"The majority of school systems now focus on delaying sexual education as

long as possible," said Barbara Huberman of Advocates for Youth, a pro-education group. "While you may get an overview of contraception in the 7th or 8th grade, there are many, many school systems that are afraid to talk about it at all."

Federal "abstinence-only" funding, supported by the Bush Administration,

has further reduced meaningful sex ed, Huberman said, by giving money only to programs that discourage all sexual intercourse.

At least 10 states, including New York, have returned millions of dollars in federal money rather than commit to an abstinence-only program.

(Justin Rocket Silverman)



This pamphlet was distributed in support of mandated sex ed.