

**RYE NECK UNION FREE SCHOOL DISTRICT**  
**HEALTH EDUCATION ADVISORY COUNCIL (HEAC)**

**Background Information**

In the late 1980s, at the height of the AIDS epidemic, the New York State's Education Department issued new requirements for local school districts under Section 135 of its health education regulations. The purpose of Section 135 was to guide school districts in the urgent task of teaching students about the then deadly AIDS disease. In addition, Subsection 135.3 required school districts to create an AIDS advisory council to assist in the development of instructional programs appropriate for their local communities.

Like most of the more than 700 public school districts across the state, Rye Neck immediately complied with these regulations and created its own AIDS advisory council. The council met periodically through the mid 1990s and was effective in helping to design the original curriculum that taught Rye Neck students about AIDS.

As successful AIDS treatments began to emerge throughout the 1990s, the AIDS epidemic was brought under control and the public's sense of urgency began to fade. The AIDS councils created to comply with Subsection 135.3 eventually disbanded across the state. In most school districts, the responsibility for AIDS instruction typically went back to the administrators responsible for the general health curriculum. At Rye Neck, the parents on the Principal's Advisory Committees in each of our four schools are currently assisting the administration in periodically reviewing and updating our health curriculum, including AIDS instruction.

But while the threat of AIDS has receded over the past few decades, Subsection 135.3 has lingered as part of state education regulations. Late last year, a group of parents questioned why there is no longer an AIDS advisory council at Rye Neck. Although the district is fully compliant with all state regulations related to our health curriculum in general, and our AIDS instruction in particular, the Board of Education's Policy Committee sought the advice of our legal counsel on the narrow issue of whether an AIDS advisory council should once again be formed. Our legal advisers agreed with members of the Policy Committee that the district should re-create an AIDS advisory council to ensure that we remain technically in compliance with all state regulations.

At a minimum, the Board could strictly follow the letter of the state regulations and form an advisory council focused exclusively on AIDS. That approach, however, seemed too limited in scope and would be unlikely to generate any significant educational benefits for our students in this day and age. In addition, it would not represent the most productive use of the valuable time we will be asking prospective volunteers to devote as members of an advisory council.

Therefore, it was decided that the most prudent course of action is to create what we're calling the Health Education Advisory Council, which will take a step back from a narrow focus on AIDS and conduct a much broader review of Rye Neck's entire health curriculum, including sex education and AIDS instruction. Once the council has reviewed our current curriculum and proposed potential changes, the Board and administration will consider whether some of the council's recommendations should be implemented at Rye Neck.