

Public Statement from Gaia Democratic School Council June 25, 2015

Gaia Democratic School (GDS) was recently embroiled in a media storm with regards to our sexual health education curriculum and field trip. The media attention was very stressful for our students and disrupted our school days. We chose to focus on completing the school year with as little disruption as possible and to wait until the end of the school year to respond to all media requests. We understand there have been several misconceptions and would like to address them.

--The topics and materials used in our sexual health classes are standard in comprehensive sexuality education (*CSE) and are used by many other respected science-based sexual health education providers.

--Every student on the field trip gave their consent and had a signed permission slip from their custodial guardian. The visit was requested by students and included instructor-led class discussion.

--Additionally, any rumors indicating that laws were broken are simply not true. The field trip location is legally accessible to all ages. GDS is not the first youth group to attend educational workshops there. Students aged 11-17 were in attendance.

We affirm our commitment to **academic freedom for all students**, even when the subject matter is considered controversial or uncomfortable. We strongly believe that youth have the right to live healthy lives and have access to information they need to protect their health and lives, which includes access to comprehensive sexual health education. At GDS our students decide what activities they participate in and may come and go from classes as they choose. To be clear, students requested both the year-long Sexual Health classes and the field trip.

We do regret that some parents were upset by our sexual health education curriculum. We are committed to increasing staff communication with parents to avoid any future misunderstandings. Recently, the School Meeting passed a resolution that all field trips be approved at least 48 hours in advance and we are happy with that decision.

While the recent media attention has been challenging, we are grateful for all the community support we have received and we are proud to be a school that highly values inclusivity, supports GLBTQIA youth and families, and has brilliant students who are actively involved in every aspect of their own educations. As the only democratic school in Minnesota, we offer students a truly unique learning community.

Gaia Democratic School remains strong and vibrant. Now that we have finished the school year, we are able to devote all of our energies to our summer program and planning for the 2015-2016 school year. We still have some openings in our summer camps and we are actively processing new applications for the fall. We are looking forward to another fantastic year of student empowerment and academic freedom.

*Definition of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) from the U.S. National Sexuality Education Standards:

CSE is the provision of accurate, factual and developmentally appropriate information and training on human sexuality topics. CSE understands sexuality as a positive, healthy part of life and teaches behavior that is respectful, responsible, non-exploitative and non-violent. CSE recognizes and respects individuality and a wide range of community norms, cultures, cultural beliefs, and language regarding healthy sexuality. CSE is designed to encourage and support youth in developing their identities. CSE recognizes the importance of communities, institutions and individuals working in partnership with families to raise sexually healthy children.

CSE programs are defined as those programs that build a foundation of knowledge and skills relating to human development, relationships, decision-making, abstinence, contraception, and disease prevention. Ideally, comprehensive sexuality education should start in kindergarten and continue through 12th grade. At each developmental stage, these programs teach age-appropriate, medically accurate information that builds on the knowledge and skills that were taught in the previous stage.