



September 30, 2004

SAN
FRANCISCO
MEDICAL
SOCIETY

Trish Bascom
School Health Department
San Francisco Unified School District

RE: NARCONON DRUG EDUCATION

Dear Ms. Bascom:

Thank you for the opportunity to review the Narconon contract for student drug education in San Francisco public schools. In order to facilitate a solid review, I asked five other independent consultants with expertise in drug abuse, including four physician specialists certified in Addiction Medicine, to join me in this review. This letter thus reflects the consensus of a half dozen reviewers.

An advocate for
Physicians
and
their Patients

In summary, we concur with the SPUSD's current decision to terminate Narconon's provision of drug education in San Francisco's public schools. There is now a large body of literature and research on drug education, including a growing number of evaluation methodologies and evidence-based programs. Criteria for what makes for optimal drug education are solidifying, after a long period - over a generation - of mostly haphazard, non-evaluated approaches (see attachment by Rodney Skager, Professor of Education at UCLA and a leading expert in this field, for details and literature citations).

Our reviewers felt that the approach and information described in the Narconon contract and materials often exemplifies the outdated, non-evidence-based, and-sometimes factually-inaccurate approach which has not served students well for decades. We concurred that the current state of the literature in this field is not reflected in the documents, that the Narconon materials focus on some topics of lesser importance to the exclusion of best knowledge and practices, that some statements in the documents are misleading, and that factual errors in basic concepts such as physical and mental effects, addiction, and even spelling are unlikely to best serve educational goals. Finally, the valid supporting information and references taken from established sources such as NIDA and medical texts are sometimes used out of proper context. One of our reviewers opined that "This reads like a high school science paper pieced together from the Internet, and not very well at that"; another wrote that "my comments will be brief, as this proposal hardly merits detailed analysis." Another stated "As a parent, I would not want my child to participate in this kind of 'education'."

As you are probably aware, there are peer-reviewed, evidence-based options for drug education available, and in fact the California Healthy Kids web site lists some of these. More useful information is available from other sources.

If you wish to discuss this issue further, I would be happy to do so.

Sincerely,

Steve Heilig, MPH
San Francisco Medical Society

1409 Sutter Street
San Francisco
California
94109
415-561-0850
FAX 415-561-0833