

The following is an email I sent in October 2017 to colleagues who teach combined 3rd and 4th grade classes to follow up on the puberty workshop I completed online and to seek input on the many sensitive elements of puberty education.

Hello Deb, Jaime, and Eric,

I recently completed a workshop about puberty and wanted to follow up with you about introducing this topic into 3/4th grade health later in the year. The key take-aways for me from the workshop were that 1) students are beginning puberty a lot younger than we think (it is not a "junior high problem!") Many girls, as well as a few boys, are starting to develop in 3rd and 4th grade, and 2) the key stressor for kids during all these changes is the fear that somehow their own development is not normal. Combining both these things made me realize that 5th grade is awfully late to start talking about how bodies change during puberty!

I am very interested in hearing from all of you about this issue, which is obviously sensitive for kids as well as their parents. My basic proposal would be to provide some puberty education at the end of the year in 3/4 health. This would not be sex. ed but would focus on the changes students can expect to see in their bodies, with heavy emphasis on the fact that there is a huge range of normal when it comes to pubertal development.

I followed up with my workshop instructor to get a bit more information about best practices with young students, and she said that girls and boys ultimately ought to receive the same information, although it is fine to separate the groups into girls and boys if we feel that would be more comfortable. Another possibility is to pull the fourth graders only for this, with the thinking that even late in third grade a lot of students are not ready to handle the content. Of course, there would be a parent letter ahead of time and families would have the option of opting out, as they do with reproduction education in 5th and 6th grade.

There is no rush on this for the moment but I wanted to put it out there to make sure I have time to discuss it with you, get your input, and address concerns. I'll check in with the administration about this soon and will also speak to the teachers in Bethel who have kiddos in this age group to get their feedback. I would be happy to attend one of your grade level meetings to talk about puberty education or discuss it with you individually. Just let me know!

Thanks!

Laurie