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Parents Express Shock and Anger Following Controversial Remarks Shared By Elementary School's Guest Speaker to 5th Graders

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Alfredo Andrews Elementary School

ST. CROIX — It was supposed to be a normal evening at the home of Leishla Carrasquillo, the mother of an 11-year-old 5th grader attending the Alfredo Andrews Elementary School. Her daughter had returned from school on February 13 and was in the bathroom with her mother having regular conversations while her mom was showering.

Ms. Carrasquillo's temperament changed when her daughter started going into detail about what had transpired at the school earlier the same day. The daughter said a female guest speaker was talking to a classroom of girls, including the 11-year-old daughter, during the school's Black

History Month event, and uttered words that left some of the young girls in the classroom gasping of out astonishment. The guest speaker's topic was on hygiene and the menstrual cycle, and she even brought an undergarment and a menstrual pad for demonstrative purposes, the girl told her mother.

But it was when the daughter said that the guest speaker told the classroom filled with the 9, 10 and 11-year-olds that there were two holes in their private area, one of which was made for "boys' penises to go in and out," that Ms. Carrasquillo became enraged and disappointed.

"I was like, so why is she talking about that? I understand the period because at that age girls do have their periods. But why would she have to mention penis when I haven't even taught my daughter about that yet?" said Ms. Carrasquillo in an interview with the Consortium. "She's only in 5th grade and I was in shock; I know we learned about this in junior high but not so early. That's so unprofessional. My daughter told me all the girls stayed with their mouths opened. Some found it funny but I didn't find it funny at all."

Katiria Flores, whose 10-year-old daughter also told her about the occurrence at the Alfredo Andrews Elementary School on Feb. 13, took further action. She visited the school and demanded answers from the principal, Andrea Hobson. Mrs. Flores had picked up her 10-year-old daughter from school, who immediately told her mother that she was about to tell her something that would be upsetting.

"She said a lady came to school today and she was talking to us about the private parts," Mrs. Flores began. Mrs. Flores said it initially appeared that what the guest speaker was sharing seemed good. "She said you have to keep it clean; she spoke about hygiene."

"Then my daughter said, 'mommy, she started to talk about two holes. She said one is to pee, and she said the next one is where the penis goes in.' Yep. And she spoke to all the 5th graders," Mrs. Flores said. Also troubling, Mrs. Flores added, nothing was said to the young girls by the school following the guest speaker's talk.

Nationally, teen pregnancy and high rates of sexually transmitted diseases have made sex education an important policy question in recent years.

The key factors in the debate has been medical accuracy and age-appropriate content.

While young people are becoming sexually active at a younger age — 66 percent of American high school students have had sex by their senior year — an important part of the debate has been the messages of abstinence rather than a comprehensive and detailed discussions about sexual activity.

"Young people are going to learn about sex and our question has to be where do we want them to learn? From the media? From their friends? Or do we want them to learn from an educated, responsible adult?" said Tamara Kreinin, president of the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States, a leading advocate of comprehensive sex education said in an NBC News report last year.

The Department of Education provided a statement to the Consortium on the matter, in which it said the situation was unfortunate and that the school had taken corrective action. D.O.E. also apologized.

"As part of Alfredo Andrews Elementary School's annual Black History Month celebration, a number of trusted guest speakers were invited to the school on February 13 to speak to female students on the topic of setting goals and being positive young ladies during a "Black Girl Magic" activity. Regretfully, at one point during a presentation to a classroom of students, one guest speaker veered into a topic she was not invited to speak on. The school's administration takes this matter very seriously and has addressed it internally. The school has apologized to the affected students and parents. Likewise, the Department of Education sincerely apologizes to all students and parents affected by this incident. We are appreciative of the strong relationships we have with many in the community who continue to partner with our schools to provide students with insightful, age-appropriate presentations that enrich their lives," reads the statement.

The Consortium followed up with a number of questions to D.O.E., including clarification on the internal actions taken to ascertain that the incident does not occur in the future; who invited the guest speaker; who was the invited speaker; and what protocols were in place to ensure that guest speakers are properly vetted before speaking to students.

The only response received was, "Guest speakers were invited and provided very specific topics to speak on during Black History Month commemoration. In the case of the singular speaker who ventured off-topic, the session was wrapped up by committee members overseeing the activity."