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SAD 49 rejects controversial play

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FAIRFIELD -- The School Administrative District 49 board has declined a request from a Waterville youth organizer for permission to use the Williamson Arts Center to stage a possibly controversial play.

The SAD 49 Board of Directors voted to deny the request put forward by Karen Heck, founder of Hardy Girls/Healthy Women, to rehearse and stage a play about bias, harassment and bullying against gays and lesbians.

Heck's proposal also included a documentary concerning the experiences of adolescent girls who are ostracized or hurt due to their real or perceived sexual orientation, according to minutes of the board meeting. The subject matter also deals with youth suicide rates.

Director Karen Kusiak of Fairfield spoke in favor of granting the request, others did not. The informal vote of the board members who were present did not permit the play to be performed.

Steve Grenier, of Albion, chairman of the SAD 49 board, said Heck was allowed to use the Williamson Center for a similar project last year, and parents were a bit shocked by the content.

"We discussed it and said that probably (the play) did not represent the morals or the values of the community that we live in," Grenier said Friday.

"It's too controversial. They have other options or institutions that might feel that those are values they would like to uphold."

Grenier said it was not the subject matter in particular, homosexuality, alone that led to the board's vote not to allow the play.

He said school property is not the place for any kind of gender-related controversy.

He said the board allowed a similar play sponsored by Hardy Girls/Healthy Women to be performed at the Williamson Center last spring and it did not work out well.

"It went though the last time," he said. "It was controversial and supposedly some parents and teachers were shocked; it shocked too many people."

Heck originally agreed to be interviewed for this story Friday, but could not be reached later in the day for comment.

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