



## WE HAVE YOUR BACK – KEY FACTS

In this document you will find some key points, statistics, and messages that you can use to when talking with your MPP, school board trustee, or anyone else about the repeal of the 2015 Health and Physical Education Curriculum.

### The Past: A Brief History of the 2015 Updated Health and Physical Education Curriculum

In 2015, Ontario made great strides towards the safety and wellbeing of children and youth across the province by updating the 1998 Health and Physical Education curriculum. This update provided Ontario's students with the tools and the skills to tackle difficult issues, including:

- Advancing social, sexual and reproductive health education for all students in an age-appropriate manner;
- Integrating prevention and intervention strategies regarding sexual and gender-based violence, including child sexual abuse and sexual assault;
- Discussing how older students can build healthy relationships and make appropriate decisions about sexual activity, including having a shared understanding with a partner about delaying sexual activity until they are older.
- Promoting inclusion and acceptance of diversity across race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression, in a manner that reflects the requirements of the 2012 Safe and Accepting Schools Act;
- Advancing the rights of LGBTQ2S+ peoples, reflecting the Ontario Human Rights Code, which includes sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression as protected grounds, and
- Promoting positive school climates and supporting LGBTQ2S+ students and families, as per the 2012 changes to the Ontario Education Act under Bill 13: The Accepting Schools Act

The 2015 curriculum was developed after extensive consultation:

- 4,000 parents, 2400 educators and 700 students across Ontario were consulted
- Over 70 health-related organizations provided input into the curriculum at multiple points in the process, as did every school board Parent Involvement Committee across the province, faith groups, and cultural groups.
- Over 150 community organizations who work with students and youth in the health, education, and social services fields supported this curriculum at the time.

The updated curriculum reflects the lived experiences of children and youth today in Ontario, and in doing so, better equips them to face the everyday challenges of our current, modern society. The curriculum provided up-to-date, evidence-based information on sexual health and development, cyberbullying and social media, sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression.





## The Present: Reverting to the 1998 Health and Physical Education Curriculum

In July 2018, Ontario returned to debates over sex education when the provincial government repealed the updated 2015 Health and Physical Education Curriculum and reverted to the 1998 curriculum. Since the creation of the 1998 curriculum, which was still in use up to 2014, much has changed. Social media became dominant, equal marriage was legalized and both gender identity and gender expression were added as protected grounds in the Ontario Human Rights Code. None of these issues, and many more, are discussed in the 1998 curriculum.

The recently announced consultation process is sorely lacking in opportunities for meaningful engagement by parents, students, educators, and health experts. It provides no opportunities to discuss curriculum changes with decision makers in person. It is a far less extensive and thorough than the consultation that went into the 2015 curriculum.

This timing and implementation of the repeal has created great confusion for educators and school boards, with 20 boards already stating their opposition to this move. There has been no time for curriculum guides or lessons plans to be developed. Educators have been left with little guidance as to what they are expected to teach. This chaos will hurt the learning environment for Ontario's students and hamper their ability to navigate the realities of 2018.

### Understanding the Harm of Returning to 1998

Community organizations, educators, students and families across Ontario are concerned about the negative impacts of returning to a curriculum that does not reflect our current, modern society. These impacts of this repeal include putting children and youth at an increased risk of negative physical, mental and sexual health outcomes. It will limit access to essential information about healthy relationships, accepting and celebrating diversity, and to the tools children and youth need to safely navigate the modern world.

The 1998 curriculum does not include mandatory, age-appropriate education on body parts, consent, healthy relationships, social media and technology as well as gender identity, gender expression and LGBTQ2S+ peoples. As such, it puts children and youth at increased risk of negatively physical, mental and sexual health outcomes.

Students returning in September will no longer have access to much of the information needed to keep themselves safe. The updated 2015 curriculum integrated child abuse intervention strategies, including teaching children the anatomically correct terms for their body parts. Researcher shows that children who are able to name their "private parts" using anatomically correct language are better able to communicate sexual abuse, and in turn, get help sooner.

The 2015 update curriculum also integrated gender-based violence prevention and intervention strategies through consent-based education. Given the disproportionate rates of sexual violence amongst children and youth in Ontario, this importance is both relevant and critical to their safety. Research shows:



- 55% of victims of sexual violence in Canada reported to the police are children and teenagers between the ages of 0 and 17 (Statistics Canada);
- Over 11,000 sexual assaults of girls under the age of 18 were reported to police in Canada in 2010 (Statistics Canada); and lastly,
- Only 10% of sexual assaults are reported to the police, which means that these statistics are much higher in reality (Canadian Women's Foundation)

In learning about consent, students were gaining an understanding of sexual assault –an evidence-based strategy in preventing sexual assault and supporting victims/survivors in disclosing their experiences of sexual assault. Given the critical importance of consent education to sexual violence and gender-based violence prevention strategies, this repeal means taking several steps back from our progress in reducing gender-based violence and creating a safer Ontario.

The decision to revert to a curriculum which includes no mention of LGBTQ2S+ does not reflect the diversity of Ontario and opens the Province to Human Right Code challenges under the protected grounds of gender identity and gender expression. As a result of this repeal, LGBTQ2S+ students will face an increased risk of violence, unsafe learning environments, suicidality and mental health issues. This is deeply concerning, given ongoing research on the experiences of unsafety and violence amongst LGBTQ2S+ students and students with LGBTQ2S+ parents in Ontario schools. Research shows:

- Almost two-thirds of LGBTQ2S students report feeling unsafe at school;
- More than one in five LGBTQ2S students reported being physically harassed and assaulted because of their sexual orientation;
- Over one quarter of youth with LGBTQ parents reported experiencing physical harassment about their parents' sexual orientation; and
- Almost half of trans students reported experiencing sexual harassment over the last year in school (Egale, 2011).

Research with educators across Canada show similar findings with regards to the safety of LGBTQ2S+ students. 97% of Canadian educators reported believing that their schools were safe or somewhat safe; yet, when asked about the safety of transgender and LGB students, only 18% and 28%, respectively, believed their schools to be safe (The Every Teacher Project, 2015). These statistics illuminate a serious issue in Ontario: that LGBTQ2S+ youth and students with LGBTQ+ parents are not safe in our schools. Reverting to the 1998 curriculum fails to uphold our responsibilities to support LGBTQ2S+ students and provide safe and inclusive schools, as outlined in the Education Act and Safe and Accepting Schools policies. Instead, it further marginalizes children, youth and families already experiencing violence and unsafety in our schools, and in some cases at home.

The inclusion of gender identity, gender expression and same-sex relationships also held symbolic value, telling LGBTQ2S+ youth and families that they are supported and valued members of





Ontarian society. A new message is now being sent: acceptance and support of LGBTQ2S+ youth and families is not a right, it is a privilege.

Inclusive education is important to all children and youth in their development as compassionate, critical thinkers. Students were learning to understand and accept the diversity amongst us – across race, religion, ethnicity, gender identity and expression, and sexual orientation. They were learning to question the stereotypes that often form the grounds of racism, islamophobia, and other forms of prejudice, discrimination and oppression. They were given the tools to become more compassionate, critical thinkers.

