

TO: Chair and members of the Board of Health

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Recommendations

It is recommended that the Board of Health:

1. Receive this report for information.
2. Provide a letter to the Minister of Education requesting that public health representation participate in the consultation taking place by the Ministry on the sexual health curriculum.

Key Points

- The Ministry of Education released the revised *Ontario Curriculum: Grades 1-8* and the revised *Ontario Curriculum: Grades 9-12* for Health and Physical Education on February 23, 2015.
- The Ministry of Education announced on July 11, 2018 that Ontario schools will go back to teaching sexual health curriculum utilized in 2014, starting fall of 2018.
- The Ministry of Education plans to consult parents on how to modernize the sexual health curriculum.
- Public health's knowledge of effective interventions and working with school boards to design and implement a sexual health curriculum that promotes diversity and inclusion provides unique insights and experience that would benefit the consultation process.

Discussion

The Ministry of Education released the revised *Ontario Curriculum: Grades 1-8* and the revised *Ontario Curriculum: Grades 9-12* for Health and Physical Education on February 23, 2015. In

September 2015, Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health Board of Health endorsed the revised curriculum with a letter of support to the Minister of Education, Liz Sandals.¹

The revised curriculum was based on the vision that it will help students develop an understanding of what is needed to make a lifelong commitment to being healthy, active living and develop the ability to lead satisfying and productive lives. The curriculum takes a broader approach to examine health in a holistic way, encouraging students to view all aspects of their health including physical, cognitive, emotional, spiritual and social aspects.²

Although well supported at Queen's Park by all three political parties in 2015 and endorsed by many organizations, some controversy exists with parents in regards to the timing of discussions about healthy relationships and anatomy as early as Grade 1, and discussions of anal and oral sex in Grade 7.³

The Ministry of Education announced on July 11, 2018 that Ontario schools will revert back to teaching sexual health curriculum revised in 1998 and taught until 2014, starting September 2018. "The sex-ed component is going to be reverted back to the manner in which it was prior to the changes that were introduced by the Liberal government," Ms. Thompson said. "We're going to be moving very swiftly in our consultations, and I will be sharing with you our process in the weeks to come."⁴ The older curriculum will remain in effect until the government completes a "fulsome consultation respecting parents" on how to modernize the material, she said.⁵

Public health has been working in schools for decades and has been pivotal in supporting schools with the changes to the curriculum. Additionally, public health is an expert in healthy growth and development, sexual health and program design. With these skills, public health is knowledgeable to assist in the consultation process to develop a sexual health curriculum that includes effective interventions. Collaborative existing relationships with school boards can be leveraged both in the design and implementation of a sexual health curriculum which promotes inclusion and diversity and also allows students to achieve healthy, active and productive lives.

Conclusion

In September, Ontario schools will be teaching Sexual Health Curriculum that was in place in 2014 prior to the revised curriculum. The Ontario government is committed to engaging parents in a consultation on how to update the curriculum that respects parents and cultures across the province. Public health, with its long experience working in schools and knowledge of sexual health, would be an important source of information during the planned government consultation process for the new curriculum.

Ontario Public Health Standard

School Health

The board of health shall offer support to school boards and schools, in accordance with the School Health Guideline, 2018 (or as current), to assist with the implementation of health-related curricula and health needs in schools, based on need and considering, but not limited to:

- Healthy sexuality

WDGPH Strategic Direction(s)

- Health Equity:** We will provide programs and services that integrate health equity principles to reduce or eliminate health differences between population groups.
- Organizational Capacity:** We will improve our capacity to effectively deliver public health programs and services.
- Service Centered Approach:** We are committed to providing excellent service to anyone interacting with WDG Public Health.
- Building Healthy Communities:** We will work with communities to support the health and well-being of everyone.

Health Equity

As the new curriculum is developed, public health will advocate to ensure the inclusion of the social determinants of health in the curriculum as they play an instrumental role in the health and well-being of all students. Furthermore, the modernized curriculum needs to align with Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy that focuses on respecting diversity, promoting inclusive education and eliminating barriers (systemic and power) that limit students ability to learn, grow and contribute to society.⁶

References

1. Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health. Revised health and physical education curriculum 2015. BOH Report BH.01.SEP0915.R24. September 9, 2015
2. Ontario. Ministry of Education. Health and physical education curriculum: Grades 1-8. [Internet]. 2015, Queen's Printer for Ontario. [Cited 2015 Aug 4] Available from: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary/health.html>
3. Ontario Ministry of Education. Ontario releases updated health and physical education curriculum, parent resources. [Memo]. 2015 Feb 23.
4. Globe and Mail. Ford government scraps controversial Ontario sex-ed curriculum. Accessed July 30, 2018 at: <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-doug-ford-government-scraps-controversial-ontario-sex-ed-curriculum/>
5. Government of Ontario. 2018. A Government for the People; Speech from the Throne. Accessed at: <https://news.ontario.ca/opo/en/2018/07/a-government-for-the-people.html>.
6. Government of Ontario. 2009. Realizing the diversity. Ontario's equity and inclusive education strategy. Accessed at: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/equity.pdf>