

Ophea and OASPHE Position Statement

Health and Physical Education (H&PE): Human Development and Sexual Health

Political Party Commitment:

As part of its Plan for Ontario, the Ontario PC party has made a broad commitment to review the Human Development and Sexual Health (“sex-ed”) component of the Health and Physical Education curriculum after additional consultations with parents. Ophea and OASPHE anticipate that this government will fulfill this commitment and have outlined recommendations for government to consider moving forward.

Ophea and OASPHE Beliefs:

Ophea and OASPHE are provincial subject associations for Health and Physical Education that believe the Health and Physical Education curriculum has the potential to positively impact the health of 2 million Ontario students by helping them develop the knowledge and skills to become healthy, productive citizens. Ophea and OASPHE believe that Ontario students have a right to learn from an up-to-date, research-based Health and Physical Education curriculum that includes human development and sexual health education, and addresses current issues including online safety, consent, self-esteem, mental health, healthy relationships, respect for others, diversity and equity. Sexual health education should be delivered in a developmentally appropriate manner and structured so that it meets the learning needs of students at different ages to build the skills they need to make healthy choices and protect themselves from potential harms. The delivery of this education should be a shared responsibility that respects the roles of both parents and teachers.

Ophea and OASPHE Recommendation – Consultation Process:

The incoming Premier has committed to working with the Minister of Education to advise on a process to review and revise the Health and Physical Education curriculum document. When the Liberal government made a commitment in 2010 to undertake additional consultations, a revised Health and Physical Education curriculum was not released until 2015. Given the timeliness and urgency of this matter, the Ontario education system cannot wait another five years for a similar process to be undertaken. Ophea and OASPHE recommend that the incoming government moves quickly to clearly outline their consultation process and revision timeline giving consideration to an interim strategy for schools while this work takes place.

In addition to engaging in a provincially representative consultation process with parents, Ophea and OASPHE recommend that the government engage with students, educators, unions, associations, public health and subject-matter experts with lived experience implementing this curriculum. This will ensure that this government has a comprehensive understanding of all perspectives prior to revisiting any curriculum content.

Ophea and OASPHE Recommendation – Interim Curriculum Strategy:

While this consultation process is underway, Ophea and OASPHE recommend that the government utilize the existing Health and Physical Education curriculum. Restoring the previous curriculum, released in 1998, will not serve the needs of today’s students. The 1998 curriculum does not clearly address current issues facing students (such as online safety), provide age-appropriate or complete health information, support informed decision making including consent and reflect all students including those with visible / invisible differences. This includes differences as protected through the Ontario Human Rights Code and also reflected in related provincial policies such Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy.

Ophea and OASPHE Recommendation – Implementation Support:

As part of the roll out of a revised curriculum, Ophea and OASPHE recommend that school boards, schools and public health units should be supported through evidence-informed approaches to implementation including coordinated development and delivery of teaching resources, professional development (including training of school board coaches / leaders), aligned communications between government and educational stakeholders and ongoing evaluation of implementation.

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