

Ontario's Health & Physical Education Curriculum

Fact Sheet

The revised Health and Physical Education (H&PE) curriculum is the most significant health promotion intervention the province of Ontario has ever seen. It has the potential to directly reach 2.1 million students attending Ontario's 5,000 publicly funded schools, including at-risk population subgroups such as children and youth of low socio-economic status, rural/urban communities, remote/Northern communities, ethno-cultural groups, as well as Anglophone and Francophone communities.

What is the revised 2010 H&PE Curriculum?

- In January 2010, the Ministry of Education released a revised elementary H&PE curriculum that would enable students to thrive in an ever-changing world by making good decisions for their personal health and wellbeing.
- The original version of the 2010 elementary H&PE curriculum that was released in January 2010 is the only curriculum (in any subject area) that integrates the learning of important living skills such as critical thinking, personal skills, and interpersonal skills and addresses a comprehensive range of topics including:
 - o physical activity
 - o healthy eating
 - o mental health
 - o sexual health
 - o safety and injury prevention
 - o substance use
 - o human development
- The development of the revised H&PE curriculum was the result of a comprehensive two year process that involved gathering of evidence and best practices from around the world and consultations with thousands of experts, parents, and for the first time, students themselves.
- The original version of the 2010 elementary H&PE curriculum has the support of many different religious groups, administrators, principals, public health professionals and parent groups.
- In April 2010, a small number of individuals raised concerns about some of the content related to human development and sexual health component of the revised H&PE curriculum. Specific teacher prompts and examples were taken out of context - sensationalized and politicized.
- As a result, in April 2010 the Ontario government withdrew the human development and sexual health section (about 10%) of the revised 2010 elementary curriculum. Elementary teachers now teach from an interim H&PE curriculum which reverts back to the 1998 growth and development section.
- When the Ontario government withdrew the curriculum it was with a promise of conducting additional consultations, despite the fact that the original version of the curriculum had been created based on consultations with thousands of experts, parents, and students themselves. To date, there has been no follow through on this commitment.
- In September 2012, more than two years after the elementary curriculum was withdrawn, Ontario students returned to school without a relevant, up-to-date H&PE curriculum. 21st century students are still being taught using a 20th century H&PE curriculum.

What is missing in the 2010 Interim H&PE Curriculum?

The human development and sexual health section of the Healthy Living strand that equates to approximately 10% of the elementary H&PE curriculum was removed from the 2010 elementary interim H&PE curriculum that teachers are using today. This means that students are learning about their body, how to make reasoned decisions, mental health promotion, and developing skills for healthy relationships based on a curriculum that is over 13 years old and does not reflect the current realities of how students get information (e.g., Internet, social media) and does not align with other provincial and national policies regarding equity and inclusion or with the Canadian Guidelines for Sexual Health Education.

What about the high school H&PE curriculum?

After the withdrawal of a portion of the revised 2010 elementary H&PE curriculum, the expected release of the revised secondary H&PE curriculum was postponed, meaning that high school students are learning from the 1999 secondary H&PE curriculum. As a result, there is a lack of consistency between the two curricula and whatever up-to-date skills and understanding that students gain as a result of the interim elementary H&PE curriculum is then lost when they reach high school.

Why is it so important that the Ministry of Education release and implement the revised H&PE curricula?

The original version of the 2010 elementary H&PE curriculum and the revised secondary H&PE curriculum provide a holistic approach to teaching students about physical activity, safety and injury prevention, healthy eating, substance use, mental health, human development, and sexual health, whereby children and youth learn to talk about themselves as a whole. Old-school teaching methods that focus on each health and physical education topic individually do not work. Current statistics show that children and youth are in desperate need of contemporary, relevant, and age-appropriate education that fits their reality (all references can be found in It's Time to Take Action for Ontario's Kids report):

- "According to the World Health Organization (WHO), many of the leading causes of death, disease and disability can be prevented or significantly reduced through effective school health programs."
- Almost 1 in 5 students reported that they were intoxicated at school at least once in a 12 month period.
- Forty-five percent (45%) of students feel that sex education classes do not adequately address their concerns.
- Thirty-six percent (36%) of students would not know where to go for help if they or a friend was experiencing mental health problems, such as stress, anxiety or depression.
- Ontario Principals, when asked to comment on the major issues in their schools, most commonly responded that they felt ill prepared to deal with the increasing number of mental health issues they were seeing.
- Less than half of children and youth are getting the recommended number of servings of fruit and vegetables daily.
- Only 32% of Ontario children and youth are getting the recommended 60 minutes of daily physical activity.

How can the H&PE Curriculum help address other key issues or policies?

The H&PE curriculum is a powerful tool to support boards of education, school administrators and teachers in implementing a number of government policies and strategies, including:

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| - The Aboriginal Education Strategy | - Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy | - Bill 113 – Accepting Schools Act |
| - Ontario's Safe Schools Strategy | - School Food and Beverage Policy | - Daily Physical Activity |
| - Progressive Discipline and Promoting Positive Student Behaviour | - Provincial Code of Conduct and School Board Code of Conduct | |