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## **We must stop politicizing Ontario's Health and Physical Education curriculum**

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Over five years ago, Ontario's Health and Physical Education curriculum was withdrawn after being misrepresented and politicized by special interest groups, media and our elected officials. Ever since, Ontario's students have been using a curriculum over 16 years old - the most out of date curriculum in all of Canada - and it has had a very real impact.

The government has undertaken a process to revise the curriculum and has publicly committed to taking steps to ensure this curriculum is released in September for the 2015/16 school year. As the curriculum release date nears, increasing attention has focussed on the Liberals handling of the Health and Physical Education curriculum. Ophea, one of Ontario's subject associations for Health and Physical Education, is asking everyone to stop politicizing this curriculum. We implore you to take the time to understand what this curriculum covers, how it's intended to be implemented, how teachers use it, what a teacher prompt is, what non-mandatory examples are, what student-centred learning means and why students need to develop these skills and knowledge in time for them to make informed decisions that will keep them safe and healthy. Fear mongering, misinformation and misrepresentation of this curriculum serves only special interests and not kids.

Much of the dialogue around the curriculum has focused on misinformation and unchecked facts. All the while our kids have been taught from a curriculum developed before cyber bullying, sexting, informed consent, and child and youth mental health were on most people's radar. Most would agree that having a Health and Physical Education curriculum developed in 1998 does not reflect current realities and does little to equip our kids to manage in today's world. We can all agree that we want our kids to grow up healthy, happy and safe. It's 2015 and our kids operate in a very different world where they are facing unprecedented mental health challenges, where physical inactivity is an epidemic, unhealthy eating is rampant, substance use and abuse are at record levels, and sexually transmitted infection rates have increased substantially. Our kids desperately deserve an updated, research based, 21<sup>st</sup> century curriculum and we all owe it to them to not politicize this curriculum any further.

This curriculum is the most consulted on curriculum in Ontario history, involving parents, teachers, medical and health professionals, and students themselves. 93% of Ontario parents have asked for this update as have Ontario students. It is our position that students have a right to receive the necessary educational opportunities to enable them to avoid preventable health problems. Educators in publicly funded schools have a shared responsibility to educate students along with the children's parents/guardians and in turn need the tools to be able to do this appropriately and successfully. The Health and Physical Education curriculum is the

most logical and suitable place to provide health information, because schools are the only formal educational institution to have meaningful contact with all students.

And what do the students want? Ontario students also think it is time for them to learn from a curriculum written in the 21st century. For the first time ever in such an extensive way, students had input into the development of this important curriculum and they are part of the group demanding the Ontario government take action now. The development of the 2010 Health and Physical Education curriculum was the result of a comprehensive two-year process that involved gathering evidence from around the world and consultations with thousands of experts, parents and students. The result was an innovative approach to help students develop the knowledge and skills to be healthy today and in the future. However, those voices have been silenced in a curriculum being held up because of politics and misinformation and that has to stop.

Ontario has been a leader in policies such as Accepting Schools, Bullying Prevention, Mental Health and Addictions, Safe Schools, Equity and Inclusion and students think their curriculum should also reflect and be informed by the principles of non-discrimination and respect for others. The health and well-being of 2.1 million children and youth in Ontario is at stake and they have waited long enough - we need to finalize and implement this critical curriculum. Our kids deserve nothing less.