



Thursday, March 2, 2017

M. Sebastien Proulx
Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports
Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur
Édifce Marie-Guyart
675, boulevard René-Lévesque Est
Aile René-Lévesque, bloc 4
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Dear Minister Proulx,

The English Speaking Catholic Council (ESCC) was founded in 1981 and represents the interests of the nearly 400,000 English-speaking Catholics in Quebec. Through the years the Council has advocated on a wide-range of Quebec educational issues, including deconfessionalization and most recently the Ethics and Religious Culture Program (ERC).

The Board of Directors of the ESCC are writing to express our concerns regarding the sexual education program introduced in pilot form in 19 Quebec schools in September 2015 and due to become mandatory in all schools in Quebec in 2017.

We would like to commend the Ministry of Education for its obvious concern with the physical and psycho/social health of Quebec's youth. The current social environment contains a number of worrying trends, not least of which is the pervasiveness of attitudes and behaviors which seem to normalize sexual abuse and assault and the rise in the prevalence of STIBBIs among Quebec's youth¹. It is no doubt in response to these trends that the Ministry feels the urgency of implementing a program which will be able to address these issues. While understanding the Ministry's motivations, the Council has a number of serious concerns regarding the method and underlying assumptions of the program.

¹ <http://www.itss.gouv.qc.ca/std-sti-stbbi.dhtml>

- We are concerned for the multi-disciplinary approach to sexual education as outlined for the new program. The program encourages not only a cross-curriculum method but also the involvement of all teachers, administrators and support staff in implementation. In theory such an approach may be thought to be a more comprehensive one and therefore more effective but in practice we believe it will result in a diluted and unsuccessful program. It is pedagogically unsound to (1) leave the curriculum to be taught by teachers who are specialized in other disciplines and have little to no training in sex education and (2) spread out the teaching throughout the disciplines and thereby never focusing solely on the material in its own right. We are also concerned that by incorporating the material into a number of different disciplines, and not presenting the curriculum in a discrete and separate fashion, it renders it extremely impractical, if not impossible, for parents to monitor their child's exposure to this material.
- Given the very sensitive nature of the program material, we are surprised that no provision has been made for (1) teaching boys and girls separately, (2) the very individual maturation processes amongst the student body which means that it would be entirely inappropriate to introduce many of the students to some of the subjects suggested or (3) an acknowledgement that there are in our classrooms students who have significant developmental delays and/or mental health issues for whom the material would be also inappropriate.
- In the Ministry of Education's publication "Sex Education in Schools: Yes, But how?" it is noted that parents, "are the persons primarily responsible for their children's education."² We are encouraged by that statement, but find in the learning content a number of guidelines that seem to put that statement into question, which in fact, have the potential to set parents and children against one another. The guidelines in multiple instances encourage educators to ask their students to question the values they are taught by their parents and to reject what they find unhelpful as they construct their sexual identities. While there may be good reasons to provide such guidelines in rare circumstances, the frequent recourse to such recommendations will place a wedge between parents and children, and this is of grave concern to us. It also represents an inherent contradiction with the Ministry's acknowledgment that parents are "primarily responsible for their children's education."

² <http://www.education.gouv.qc.ca/en/references/publications/results/detail/article/sex-education-in-schools-yes-but-how/>

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- Sexual education, as attempted in this program, is an education in values, norms, and, ultimately, in what it means to be human. Quebec is not a homogenous cultural society; rather it is a pluralistic one. But this program presents one view of human sexuality as if it should be normative, and is, in fact, prejudicial to opinions other than those as presented in the government guidelines. The word “traditional” as used in the teaching guidelines is in effect a pejorative term.³ Students from “cultural communities” are said to have a more difficult time “constructing their own identity.” This attitude is, to put it mildly, extremely patronizing. From our own perspective the “Learning Content” guidelines for both primary and secondary levels contain material which is in direct contradiction to Catholic teaching on sexuality and sexual behaviour. For example: 7-8 year olds are taught that the “anus” is a “sexual organ,”⁴ (despite the fact that anal intercourse is a criminal offense in Canada); the use of artificial contraception is not only discussed but described as responsible sexual behaviour, whereas there is no mention, let alone teaching, of alternative methods (e.g., fertility awareness); sexual experimentation, including masturbation, one-night stands and “friends with benefits” are presented in a positive light. In addition, sexual relationships between adolescents are presented not only as the norm but serving a “useful contribution to adolescent development.” Students who by the age of 16-17 have not engaged in a “romantic” relationship are presented as at a disadvantage, “more likely to experience fluctuations of emotion and behaviour.”⁵ Though we speak as Catholics, we are certainly not the only cultural or religious community that would have grave concerns with our children being taught material which is so fundamentally opposed to our understanding of sexuality and sexual behaviour.
 - Given the controversial nature of much of this material, the Council feels that the rolling out of the pilot program, the reporting on the reception of the program in the pilot schools and the proposed universal implementation in September 2017 has been severely under-reported and under-discussed at all levels. Whereas the new proposed history curriculum has received a fair amount of press and there has been opportunity for revisions to the curriculum, the new sexuality education program has received little to none. So little attention, in fact, that one principal of an elementary school in the western end of the island of Montreal, as late as September 2016 had no knowledge
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³ “...other more traditional norms continue to exist and influence the beliefs of adolescents about gender roles and the relations between men and women (e.g. double standard regarding the socially acceptable sexual behaviours of girls as opposed to boys, the initiation of sexual behaviours).”, pg. 4, Learning Content in Sexuality Education, Secondary School.

⁴ Learning Content in Sexuality Education, Kindergarten and Elementary, pg. 2.

⁵ Learning Content in Sexuality Education, Secondary School, pg. 8.

that her teachers would be responsible in September 2017 for sex education. In addition, as of the writing of the letter, no professional development days have been scheduled for training in this subject. If the governing boards and parents are the stakeholders in our schools, then it is not clear to us why they have not been canvassed and given the opportunity to help shape the curriculum.

The Board of Directors of the English Speaking Catholic Council respectfully submit that any proposed implementation be suspended or postponed until the aforementioned issues and concerns are better studied and addressed. In the meantime, the Council would very much appreciate an opportunity to discuss these matters in person, and therefore ask for a meeting with the Minister at his earliest convenience.

Yours faithfully,



Diane Lemay
President