

Recommendations to Improve Sexual Health Education in BC’s Schools

Dear Minister Bernier,

Since February, our Social Justice 12 class has been working to develop ideas for improving sexual health education in BC’s schools. During this time, we examined BC’s existing sexual health curriculum in detail, met with experts, and held lots of discussions based on our own experiences in this area. As an outcome of this process, we would now like to recommend the following:

| Recommendations | Our Reasons |
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| Curriculum | |
| <p>1. Amend the K-10 curriculum to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) a wide-ranging discussion of sexual consent b) emphasis on being comfortable with one’s sexuality and gender identity as well as being aware and respectful of differences between people in these areas c) an explicit discussion of healthy and respectful relationships (family, friends, romantic and/or sexual partnerships etc.) d) more discussion of the positive aspects of sexuality (e.g. feelings, sensations) <p>All the above should receive full, nuanced, and age-appropriate treatment, throughout the K-10 curriculum. (See Appendix A for proposed changes).</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Although sexual violence at post-secondary institutions has received much attention lately, this issue is just as pressing in the schools. It is shocking to us that 18% of BC’s grade 7-12 students report having been physically sexually harassed, and 6% report having had non-consensual sex.¹ Teaching about sexual consent must start in our schools, as that is where students first learn about appropriate and inappropriate sexual behaviours. b) Unfortunately our schools are not yet safe or welcoming for all students. Four percent of all students report being discriminated against because of their sexual orientation (including 64% of lesbian students, 47% of gay males, and 37% of bisexual students).² Teaching students to understand and respect difference needs to start early, in an age-appropriate way. c) Relationships are such an important part of life. Yet the curriculum makes no specific mention of romantic or sexual relationships and how to ensure that they are healthy and based on respect. d) Sexuality is a normal, healthy part of being human. Yet the curriculum focuses exclusively on the potential risks of sexuality. This gives students an imbalanced perspective. The curriculum needs to be more sex-positive, knowing that studies show this will in no way increase early sexual activity. |

¹ McCreary Center Society, Sexual Health of Youth in BC (2015), p. 10.

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| <p>2. Include a course with a strong sexual education component in the core curriculum for grades 11-12.</p> <p>Example: A “Human Wellbeing” course that could include physical; mental; social and sexual health components. This course should include a strong group-discussion component.</p> | <p>Currently, sexual health education ends in grade 10. Yet only about a third of BC students have had sex by that point in their lives (age 16).³ Information and skills need to be taught up until graduation because it’s relevant at different times for different teens.</p> |
| <p>Supports</p> | |
| <p>3. Require that students receive at least four co-ed sexual health classes per year, starting in the elementary grades.</p> | <p>Currently, students receive about 80 minutes (one class) of sexual health education per year. Miss that class, and you’re out of luck! This is no-where near enough to properly cover the nuanced and multi-faceted topic. We suggest following the Netherlands’ example by requiring at least four classes per year on this topic.</p> |
| <p>4. Work with school districts, the BC Teachers’ Federation (BCTF) and others to cultivate teachers who are passionate about sexual education and provide these teachers with the supports they need to excel (including additional training).</p> | <p>Many of us have witnessed first-hand teachers who aren’t comfortable teaching sexual health or who don’t know how to do this effectively. But we also know that some teachers really excel in this area. Schools need to recognize, organize and support these teachers to become the go-to sexual health experts for their schools.</p> |
| <p>5. Work with school districts to provide dedicated funding to bring in more professional sexual health educators to the classes.</p> | <p>Sexual health and sexuality can be very sensitive, nuanced topics. Professional sexual health educators do a great job but schools don’t bring them in often enough.</p> |
| <p>6. Involve students in any future discussions related to sexual health education</p> | <p>Students are a great resource. We have first-hand experience and are passionate about this topic. Please involve us!</p> |

² McCreary Center Society, From Hastings Street to Haida Gwaii: Provincial results of the 2013 BC Adolescent Health Survey (2013), p. 51.

³ McCreary, Sexual Health of Youth in BC, p. 10.