

Myth vs. Fact

February 23, 2015

Release of the revised curriculum for Health and Physical Education, Grades 1 to 12

Myth: Students will be learning about having sex in Grade 1.

Fact: In Grade 1, students will be learning about anatomy, personal hygiene (e.g. hand washing), and how to interact respectfully with their peers. Young children need to be able to identify the correct names for their body parts in order to communicate clearly and get help if they need to in cases of abuse, illness or injury. They start to learn about expressing their romantic feelings in Grade 5, and only start to learn about sexual activity in Grade 7.

Myth: Students will be learning about masturbation in Grade 6.

Fact: While the concept of masturbation is included in Grade 6 curriculum, it is mentioned in an optional prompt. It is there to support teachers in responding to student questions that may arise. Teachers have repeatedly stated that students often ask questions on this topic, and they need guidance on how to answer in a factual and consistent manner. This is **not** a mandatory learning expectation. Experts have also pointed out that many children in fact start masturbating before puberty begins.¹

Myth: Students will be learning about anal and oral sex in Grade 7.

Fact: In Grade 7, the curriculum expects students identify ways of preventing STIs (including HIV) and/or unintended pregnancy. It talks about delaying intercourse and other sexual activities until a person is older, and using condoms consistently if and when they become sexually active. Oral and anal sex are included as topics for discussion to ensure all students are aware of the risks associated with any form of sexual behaviour. Many students believe oral and anal sex are safer alternatives as they cannot get pregnant, but Public Health Agency of Canada data tells us the rate of chlamydia and gonorrhoea has been increasing since the late 90s and mostly affects teenagers and young adults. From 2002 to 2011, Ontario's reported chlamydia rate has increased by 81% while the reported gonorrhoea rate has increased by more than 20%.²

¹ <http://www.plannedparenthood.org/health-info/sexuality/masturbation>

² http://www.catie.ca/sites/default/files/64-02-14-1200-STI-Report-2011_EN-FINAL.pdf

Myth: We don't need a new curriculum – ours is working because the teenage pregnancy rate is decreasing.

Fact: While it's true that Ontario's teen pregnancy rate has been decreasing (between 1995 and 2005, Ontario's rate decreased by more than 50%³), Public Health Agency of Canada data tells us the rate of chlamydia and gonorrhea has been increasing since the late 90s and mostly affects teenagers and young adults. From 2002 to 2011 in Ontario, chlamydia rate has increased by 81% while gonorrhea rate has increased by more than 20%.⁴ Beyond that, a study involving students in Grades 9 and 10 shows us the high level of sexual activity taking place in that age group – 22% of the students admitted to having had sexual intercourse by that age.⁵

Myth: Curriculum will be encouraging children to be homosexuals.

Fact: The curriculum reflects the diversity of Ontario, and teaches students to appreciate and respect the visible and invisible differences between people. It reflects the laws of the Province, including The Ontario Human Rights Code that explicitly prohibits discrimination on grounds including age, colour, race, ethnicity, disability, family status, gender identity, and sexual orientation.⁶ The curriculum is built on the principal that regardless of race, gender, religion or sexual orientation, all students have the right to a safe and positive learning environment. It is not a how-to manual – it teaches kids that we are all different and that should be respected.

Myth: Children will be taught to question if they are a boy or a girl.

Fact: The curriculum teaches children that not all fit into the typical male and female stereotypes – not all boys like playing cars and not all girls like playing with dolls. Students are not pushed to question their own gender identity, but to recognize that others may identify themselves differently. Ontario is the most diverse province in Canada, and our students need to respect and understand there are differences among people.

³ <http://www.sexualityandu.ca/sexual-health/statistics1/statistics-on-canadian-teen-pregnancies>

⁴ http://www.catie.ca/sites/default/files/64-02-14-1200-STI-Report-2011_EN-FINAL.pdf

⁵ www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/healthyschools/HBSCReportJan2013.pdf

⁶ http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/statutes/english/elaws_statutes_90h19_e.htm

Myth: Curriculum will be making children more prone to having sex.

Fact: The large amount of research conducted on this topic proves the opposite. In fact research conducted by the World Health Organization⁷ and the United Nations⁸, which looked at information across jurisdictions around the world, shows that when young people are provided with a comprehensive sexual health education program they are more likely to wait longer and be safer when becoming sexually active.

Myth: We all grew up with less information about these subjects and we turned out fine.

Fact: Students today are living and experiencing things that were not thought possible a generation ago. They are also beginning to physically mature at an earlier age than kids did even a generation ago. Young girls today are starting puberty as early as age 7.^{9,10}

Myth: We're killing the innocence of children by talking about sex at a young age.

Fact: Kids today are bombarded with sexual images every moment through TV, books, and online. The curriculum presents them with facts and accurate information to help them filter and understand what they are seeing on a daily basis. A survey on youth internet safety found that one in four kids have been unintentionally exposed to sexual content online, with about six percent being traumatized by the experience.¹¹ In another research study, 23% of students in Grades 7-11 admitted to seeking out pornography online.¹² Students today need an alternative place to develop a filter in through which they can interpret and understand what they are seeing and experiencing.

Myth: Parents will not be able to have any say in the education of their children with this curriculum.

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<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/teachers/teachingresources/social/physed/sexeduqanda.pdf>

⁸ <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001832/183281e.pdf>

⁹ <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/126/3/e583.full?sid=77d0885d-1965-4761-9237-57ddbcedbed6#cited-by>

¹⁰ <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/123/5/e932.abstract?sid=6ca52e29-3c60-49de-b0c5-2cff710a5ebb>

¹¹ <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojdp/fs200104.pdf>

¹² http://mediasmarts.ca/sites/mediasmarts/files/pdfs/publication-report/full/YCWWIII_Life_Online_FullReport.pdf

Fact: Ontario's education system is built on parents and schools working together for the betterment of their students. Parents play an integral role in their children's education, especially in educating children on sexuality and sexual health. Schools address these topics to ensure all students have access to factual, accurate information about their health and well-being. Parents are responsible for sharing their values, morals, cultural and religious beliefs with their children. This curriculum will not be replacing the role of parents in educating their children on sexuality and sexual health.

Myth: There are many drastic changes to the curriculum - we didn't need to rewrite the whole 1998 curriculum.

Fact: Many of the topics being brought up are not new additions to the curriculum. In the previous 1998 version of the curriculum, students in Grade 1 were required to learn the correct names for their body parts; students in Grade 5 learned about puberty; and students in Grade 7 learned about sex, and the prevention of STIs and unintended pregnancy.

Myth: Teachers are going to take this curriculum and use it to indoctrinate children.

Fact: Teachers are professionals and are trained to teach sensitive material. The Ministry will be providing professional development and training for teachers across the province starting this spring, and will also be developing additional resources to help them teach these topics effectively in the classroom.

Myth: I already teach my kids how to be safe and respectful to others even when online.

Fact: While many parents do take the opportunity to discuss online conduct and safety with their children, there are still instances of unacceptable behaviour occurring online that puts children in harm's way. A study conducted by Kids Help Phone reported that 70% of the kids surveyed have been bullied online, and 44% admitted to bullying others.¹³ It has also been highlighted that by Grade 11, on average, at least three kids per classroom have sent a 'sext'.¹⁴

¹³ http://events.kidshelpphone.ca/flipbooks/CriticalIssueReports/2007_CyberBullying_EN.pdf

¹⁴ http://mediasmarts.ca/sites/mediasmarts/files/publication-report/full/ycwwiii_trends_recommendations_fullreport.pdf

Myth: I've raised my kids well and my son knows how to be a gentleman.

Fact: Parents play an integral role in their children's education. Schools and parents need to work together to address the safety and well-being of all students and ensure they are working together to set their students up for success. In Ontario however, 46% of girls in secondary school have reported to being at the receiving end of unwanted sexual comments or gestures. Furthermore, 27% of girls in Grades 9-11 reported to have been pressured into doing something sexual that they did not want to do.¹⁵

Myth: Parents were not consulted on the curriculum.

Fact: The revision of the Health and Physical Education curriculum is the result of work undertaken through the curriculum review process which began in 2007. This review is the most extensive curriculum consultation process ever undertaken by the ministry and involved parents, students, teachers, faculties of education, universities, colleges and numerous stakeholder groups including the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, The Ontario Public Health Association and the Ontario Healthy Schools Coalition. The ministry heard from more than 70 health-related organizations that submitted reports for consideration. Near the end of last year, the Ministry also provided an opportunity for more than 4,000 parents from every elementary school across Ontario and from all four publically funded school systems to provide their input.