

2 October 2015

Message from the Director: Revised Health and Physical Education Curriculum

Through ongoing discussion with parents, principals and teachers, my assessment is that for the most part, TDSB parents are supportive of the revised Ministry of Education Health and Physical Education curriculum. It has been 17 years since the curriculum was updated and in that time the world has most definitely changed: the diversity of our population has changed, access to materials online has greatly increased and research has shown that puberty is beginning at an earlier age.

The Ministry has done a very good job of providing information and resources for parents to learn more about the revised curriculum. In fact, I would say there is more detailed information available for health and physical education than for math, science or any other subject area. The TDSB website is also a resource for parents and includes information about how we are approaching implementation of the curriculum in our schools.

Some of our parents have made it clear that they have questions and concerns. I want to reaffirm that the TDSB is committed to working with parents to answer their questions and where we can, resolve these concerns. I strongly believe that most issues can be successfully dealt with at the school level, with parents, principals, teachers and students working together.

The Human Development and Sexual Health portion of this curriculum is just one of a number of topics covered within health and physical education. We are beginning professional development with teachers this fall and expect that this portion of learning will likely commence in the spring, leaving plenty of time for parents to talk to principals and teachers, ask questions and express any concerns. Our teachers are skilled professionals who know their students well and are committed to teaching in a professional and respectful manner that is both developmentally and age-appropriate.

Some parents have decided to protest the revised curriculum by removing their children from school – a move that has a very negative impact on student learning. There are only approximately 190 instructional days in each school year, and every day a student is not in the classroom is a precious day of their education lost. Parents who feel they need to protest to make their point have every right to do so, but I believe children need and want to be in school and health and physical education is an essential part of the curriculum.

For many years, TDSB schools have made accommodations for students based on their religious beliefs and practices, and we will continue to do so. However, we will not allow students to opt out of lessons or classroom discussions about gender identity or sexual orientation. As a public school board, we believe that it is important to foster greater understanding by students about these topics and to promote a learning environment that is consistent with the protections against discrimination found in the Ontario Human Rights Code.

Once again, I urge parents to learn more about what is and what is not included in the curriculum and to work directly with school administrators to ensure all students can remain where they belong - in the classroom.

Donna Quan  
Director of Education