November 20, 2010

Hon. Dalton McGuinty, Premier
Legislative Bldg, Room 281
Queen’s Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A1

Dear Premier McGuinty:

Re: 2010 Ontario Curriculum Grades 1-8 Health and Physical Education: Human Development and Sexual Health

I am writing on behalf of the Board of Health for the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit to request that you reinstate the proposed “Human Development and Sexual Health” content of the 2010 Health and Physical Education Curriculum for Grades 1-8 prior to May 2011.

There have been numerous reports written that support the critical need for education to raise awareness on diversity among school aged children, and for the elimination of bullying related to visible and invisible differences. The Ontario education system must take the steps necessary to ensure the development of positive self identity and respect for self and others in our children and youth.

In a recent study of sexual minority youth, “school was reported as the setting for 72% of first experiences with verbal victimization and 56 per cent of first experiences with physical victimization.”1 Sexual minority youth are 1.5 to 7 times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual peers.2 It is critical that these vulnerable youth feel safe, supported and valued in order to ensure that they remain in school to complete their education. “A sense of hopelessness and suicidal tendencies has been linked to high risk sexual behaviour” which further puts them at risk for STIs and HIV.3 The same study of youth found that a school climate in which diversity is respected and rules are clear benefits all adolescents.1

This revised new curriculum document is the result of broad consultation with key stakeholders. It provides comprehensive evidence-based curriculum which is reflective of societal changes and encourages students to make healthy decisions.

Failure to provide accurate, non-judgmental, and age-appropriate information in schools which fosters respect, tolerance and equity within the schools represents not only a pressing health and educational concern, but also has significant public health implications. Curriculum-based sexual health education programs have been shown to delay or reduce sexual behaviours, and increase condom and contraceptive use.
We urge you to not delay the implementation of this new curriculum any further.

Yours truly,

Original signed by

Dennis Roughley
Chair, Board of Health
Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit

DR:JF:mk

c. Hon. Leona Dombrowsky, Education Minister
   Julia Munroe MPP York Simcoe
   Garfield Dunlop MPP Simcoe North
   Aileen Carroll MPP Barrie
   Norm Miller, MPP Parry Sound-Muskoka
   Jim Wilson MPP Simcoe Grey
   Linda Stewart, Executive Director, alPHa
   Dr. Arlene King, CMOH, MOHLTC
   All Ontario Boards of Health
   North Simcoe Muskoka Local Health Integrated Network
   Central Local Health Integrated Network
   Brian Beal, Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District School Board
   Anita Simpson, Simcoe County District School Board
   Catherine Shedden, Trillium Lakelands District School Office
   Mikale-Andrée Joly, Conseil scolaire du district catholique Centre-Sud
   Gyslaine Hunter-Perreault, Conseil scolaire Viamonde

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1 Sandfort, Bos, Collier & Metselaar (2010) American Journal of Public Health 100(9) 1696-1700
2 Public Health Agency of Canada (2010) Sexual Orientation in Schools
3 Public Health Agency of Canada (2010) Gender Identity in Schools