

Public board pushes back on sex-ed issue

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The Rainy River District School Board has taken a stand for diversity and inclusivity in its classrooms.

Last Tuesday, it passed a motion to write the premier and minister of education a letter in support for the recently-scrapped 2015 sexual health curriculum.

“Reverting to an outdated, inactive curriculum that is absent of very relevant and vital information regarding physical, mental, and emotional safety of students not only puts students at risk, but is also inconsistent with other legislation which the board is legally bound to comply,” said RRDSB chair Diane McCormack.

“The dangers and confusion created by repealing this 2015 curriculum for Grades 1-8 is even more concerning considering the government does not

appear to have any specific timeline in place to replace the outdated version,” she added.

On Aug. 22, school board chairs across Ontario received an e-mail from the education minister that said beginning in September, and until consultations for a new curriculum take place, the interim curriculum that was drafted in 1998 will be taught instead.

Since then, school boards across the province have cited problems around the 1998 curriculum’s lack of information on modern issues such as consent, online behaviour, and sexual orientation.

Many concerns have been raised locally, as well.

“It attempts to erase LGBTQ2 people from the classroom,” Borderland Pride co-chair and local lawyer Douglas Judson during a presentation he gave on sex-ed at last Tuesday’s public board meeting here.

Judson also outlined the importance of the information in-

cluded in the recently-scrapped 2015 curriculum.

“What was revolutionary and, frankly, really long overdue about the 2015 curriculum is that the content of human development and sexual health includes information about sexual orientation, gender identity, same-sex relationships, and on-line safety,” he noted.

“None of that was reflected in the 1998 curriculum, which was drafted before same-sex marriage was legalized, and before the sea change in LGBTQ rights which follow those court rulings

“In 1998, as we all know, high-speed internet was not a day-to-day reality of our work or our recreation, and none of our kids had smartphones or tablets of their own to get into trouble with,” Judson added.

His concerns with the 1998 curriculum being taught in the interim not only stem from its absence of relevant information, but also the legal ramifica-

tions that school boards could face when teaching an outdated and uninclusive curriculum.

“The interim curriculum isn’t just out of step with contemporary facts but it’s also contrary to the Education Act, Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and the Human Rights Code, which are each superior authorities to an e-mail from the minister of education,” Judson stressed.

“The Education Act requires that every school board promotes a positive school climate that is inclusive and accepting of all pupils . . . accepts sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or family status.”

Judson subsequently explained how the province’s decision to revert to the 1998 curriculum also is contrary to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

An example of this would be by removing reference to

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sexual orientation, gender identity, and same-sex relationships.

In doing this, Judson said the province is degrading and alienating LGBTQ2 students, as well as undermining their equality.

“The government’s approach leads one to the conclusion that it believes and intends to convey that there is something wrong with LGBTQ2 people from which others should be shielded or protected,” he argued.

Judson also touched on how the minister’s actions negatively can impact both the equality and security of students.

“As you know, women, girls, LGBTQ2 people, and people with disabilities are disproportionately effected by sexual violence, assaultive behaviour, and



Local lawyer and Borderland Pride co-chair Douglas Judson gave a presentation to the Rainy River District School Board at its regular monthly meeting last Tuesday evening about the legal impacts of the province’s decision to revert back to the 1998 health and sex-ed curriculum he says are contrary to sections of both the Education Act and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

—Sam Odrowski photo

Judson told trustees that the minister’s directive likely constitutes both direct and indirect

increased risk of self-harm or suicide, and a general sense of shame about one’s identity and

the continuing of keeping that curriculum in place,” said Borderland Pride co-chair Peter

harassment," he noted.

"The interim curriculum fails to equip them with the tools they need to clearly communicate about consent and the governing of their bodies.

"And places them at a heightened risk of harm as a result of that," he warned.

Lastly, Judson explained how the Human Rights Code in Ontario could be violated by the 1998 curriculum.

The code is aimed at protecting Ontarians from discrimination based on sex, gender, sexual orientation, or family status.

This legal document applies to the delivery of education and

situates both direct and indirect discrimination.

"In our view, direct discrimination emerges because it excludes LGBTQ2 issues and fails to provide LGBTQ2 students with equally-relevant health information to other students," he reasoned.

"But even if it isn't a direct discrimination, in our view it is an indirect discrimination because it sends the message that queer students simply do not exist or their existence isn't something we should talk about in public.

"That sets the stage for years of trauma and isolation, crisis,

shame about one's identity and their belonging," he noted.

Following his presentation, Judson urged the board to issue a response to the minister outlining their position and intention of continuing to implement the 2015 curriculum.

Borderland Pride was thrilled with the board's response and motion to write a supportive letter.

"We think this is an important first step of the school board to become engaged in this issue, and it help sends a message to the Ontario government that there is wide support for the 2015 curriculum and

Borderland Pride co-chair Peter Howie, who also attended last Tuesday's board meeting.

Both Judson and Howie are hoping to make a similar presentation to the Northwest Catholic District School Board in the near future.

Howie urges members of the public who are concerned about this issue to write their local MPP and the minister of education, as well as participate in whatever consultation process takes place.

The minister of education has not indicated yet when consultations for the new curriculum will occur.