

For Immediate Release

Parents' role should not be ignored in school-based sex education

Research shows parents more influential than curriculum

Ottawa, Canada, November 19, 2014 – The Institute of Marriage and Family Canada's latest research shows how provinces can make sex education more effective by involving parents. Today they release their report [**Making sex education work: Tips for Ontario and other provinces revising their curricula – and tips for parents.**](#)

The report recounts concern over Ontario's 2010 revised elementary school curriculum – pulled before being implemented, due to parental backlash. The Ministry of Education failed to adequately communicate curriculum changes, and parents had concerns about the age appropriateness of the material.

"Age appropriateness" is elusive but important. The American Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry advises that "[P]arents should respond to the needs and curiosity level of their individual child, offering no more or less information than their child is asking for and is able to understand." Unfortunately, provincial curriculum has limited flexibility to suit the sensitivity of each child. Readiness differs from child to child, sometimes even within the same family.

As a result, the IMFC report recommends:

- The creation of a forum to facilitate parental feedback from all parents who wish to provide it
- Students be sent materials home ahead of the lesson to help parents evaluate the appropriateness of the content for their child
- Parents be notified before outside groups are invited to the classroom
- Parents be given the option to pursue alternative lessons appropriate to their child's readiness

Parents are the primary sexuality educators of their children, and it is impossible to divorce this topic from values. Therefore, ministries of education should carefully consider the diversity of their classrooms. Curriculum must accommodate a range of values that parents hold.

Importantly, the report points out that the impact of sex ed curricula, when measured, has little effect on teen sexual behaviour.

One reason is that the teenage brain is still developing in areas affecting judgment and the regulation of emotion. Lessons in school have far less impact than parents, who often underestimate their own influence.

“Teens rate parents as the most influential source in their sexual decision making,” explains report author Peter Jon Mitchell.

“Studies show that a warm, supportive parenting style combined with firm limits and adequate supervision result in reduced sexual risk behaviour.”

Curriculum, however, does not always correlate with improved outcomes. In New Brunswick, after a progressive curriculum was introduced in the mid-2000s, the teen pregnancy rate increased by almost 40%.

The report recommends that Ontario Ministry of Education evaluate the impact of any new curriculum on student health. Outcomes should be tracked as a curriculum is changed.

The full report can be found online at:

www.imfcanada.org/making-sex-education-work

To arrange an interview please contact Eloise Cataudella at 613-565-3832, ext. 7505.