

Provincial Consultation on Education, submitted by the Canadian Federation of University Women – Markham/Unionville Chapter

According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child - Article 28

“Parties recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity.”

1. Improving student performance in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM)

In response to five years of declining Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) math scores, the Ontario government is proposing to “place more focus on math fundamentals. Teachers will be provided with the resources they need to move away from Discovery Math, and back to traditional formulas and memorization techniques. Grade 9 and 10 math teachers will be provided with resources as they support students moving from elementary to secondary school math courses.”

- While Canadian Federation of University Women-Markham/Unionville agree that curriculum should regularly be strengthened and updated to keep pace with the needs and demands of a rapidly changing world, our first response is to ask whether there has been an attempt to examine the validity of EQAO assessment to determine why the math results are so different than other measures such as the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) where Ontario scores significantly above the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development average (OECD)?
- While we are pleased to read that the government plans to hire math facilitators and leads at the Board and school levels, we ask whether classrooms across the province will be equitably funded to provide students with computers/tablets, science labs, circuits and hands-on materials rather than relying on school fundraising efforts to pay for expensive education resources which create board by board, school by school inequities across the province. Has any research taken place to consider whether lower EQAO scores are linked to those schools with resource disparities?
- While mandatory Professional Activity days on fundamental math skills will be an important part of teacher training, we suggest that improving STEM achievement requires more classroom supports, more personnel, adequate resources, continuing professional development, and differentiated instruction to meet individual student learning needs.
- We also suggest that proposed solutions need to be data-driven and evidence-based. It is important that we not focus too much on the skills and strategies of the past, but instead on techniques and the competencies of the future. STEM and Arts curricula, developed through a balanced approach of fundamentals and inquiry learning, are needed for life in the 21st century. According to UNESCO – Futures of Learning 2 by Cynthia Luna Scott, November 2015 “There is a need for curricula that are open to learner input, interdisciplinary in focus, and blend informal and formal learning in an effective manner. Problem solving, reflection, creativity, critical thinking, risk-taking, communication, collaboration, innovation and entrepreneurship will become key competencies for twenty-first century life and work.”

6. Health & Physical Education Curriculum

The Canadian Federation of University Women (CFUW) supports equal access to quality public education. Believing that education is essential for all, and that curriculum should be taught free from gender bias and stereotypes, we are compelled to respond to the Ontario government's plan to revise the Health & Physical Education (H&PE) curriculum. Despite the Ontario Public School Board Association (OPSBA) acknowledging that the 2015 H&PE version reflected the "health, safety and well being realities faced by today's student" teachers are currently required to use curriculum last taught in 2014.

CFUW Markham/Unionville chapter urges the Ontario government to devise a H&PE curriculum based on these critical elements:

- Comprehensive evidence-based sexual health research
- Free of gender bias and stereotypes
- Consent focus referencing the plan "It's Never Okay"
- Gender identity including LGBTQ12S
- HIV and AIDS, sexting, mental health, legalization of cannabis, and bystander intervention strategies.

Researched benefits of a comprehensive health and sexuality curriculum include:

- Increase in student self esteem and dignity
- Greater tolerance and gender sensitivity
- Prevention of sexual violence & assault, early pregnancy, and STI transmission
- Informed decision making
- Greater achievement and success navigating the issues of society today.

Finally, as members of CFUW Markham/Unionville, we believe that given a comprehensive health & sexuality curriculum, students will have the information to make wise choices, so they can be healthy, and be prepared to live successful lives in our society.

7. Developing the First-ever Parents' Bill of Rights

CFUW –Markham/Unionville response to the Ontario government's Ontario Education Consultation: The proposal for A Parents' Bill of Rights.

Doug Ford and Lisa Thompson, Minister of Education announced in August 2018 that parents will "have an opportunity to have their voices heard on the kind of curriculum their children are taught in school."

They want an "education system that puts the rights of parents first..." We believe that our schools should be focusing on putting the needs and rights of children first by providing equitable access to high quality education in a supportive learning environment.

There are many organized groups that already speak on behalf of the parents in Ontario. Along with School Board trustees, and organizations like "People for Education" we have Parent Councils in our

schools and the Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA). They represent public district school boards and offer support and Professional Development for Trustees.

This organization has produced a consultation resource that includes evidence-based information and past position statements for each government consultation question.

On the matter of a Parents' Bill of Rights, they've emphatically stated that a "formalized Parents' Bill of Rights is not necessary."

On their website they list all of the ways the Ministry of Education and school boards have helped to build dialogue with parents to enhance their child's education.

Homeschooling and Independent School Systems

We are concerned that due to a lack of regulations and oversight some communities/individuals are using the independent school systems and homeschooling to enforce curricula that is harmful to a child's development and well-being. Inconsistent provincial policies and regulations create discrepancies and inequalities in terms of education opportunities as well as the social justice education children receive. We note that Ontario has very few homeschooling regulations. [i]

We ask that you ensure your party is committed to provide access to quality educational content that empowers children to achieve their full potential.

Markham/Unionville CFUW recommends:

That the **provincial government work in collaboration with the federal and territorial ministries** through the Council of Ministers of Education Canada to ensure equitable access to provincial and territorial curricula and social justice education for all children; in particular, **to examine the disparities across provincial and territorial homeschooling programs** with the intent to review and implement best practices regarding policies, regulations and oversights. In addition we recommend that all schools, whether public or privately funded, should be required to be in compliance with Ministry regulations and policies at all levels of instruction and be inspected.

We call on you to protect the human rights and well-being of our children.

[i] Boscetti, L. & Van Pelt, D. (May/Aug. 2017) Provisions for Homeschooling in Canada: Parental Rights and the Role of the State. *ProPosicoes*, Vol 28 No. 2. Retrieved from http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0103-73072017000200039