Peel District School Board

Facts Matter
Working together to keep our students safe and healthy

2016 NSPRA National School Communications Award
Gold Medallion Award Entry
Special Communication Projects/Campaigns

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**Synopsis**

The Peel District School Board is one of the largest, fastest growing and most culturally diverse school systems in North America with 153,000 students in 250 schools.

On Feb. 23, 2015, the Ministry of Education—a branch of the provincial government of Ontario—released its updated Health and Physical Education (HPE) curriculum. The curriculum was met with public criticism, particularly for the human development and sexual health components (commonly known as “sex ed”). As districts did not receive advance notice of the curriculum, boards were left scrambling—staff did not see it before it was shared with the public.

Many parents did not feel that they were adequately consulted, and believed the curriculum was not age-appropriate. Also, curriculum documents created confusion, as they were difficult to understand for the general public. Although the curriculum only included minor changes, misinformation and myths began to spread in the community, resulting in negative reactions from many parents, particularly from the district’s culturally and religiously diverse communities.

Peel families and community groups participated in numerous delegations at board meetings and protests at district and government locations. Schools received thousands of letters from parents expressing concerns, some threatening to homeschool their children. In May 2015, community groups organized a province-wide strike to keep children home for one day or week in protest.

In February 2015, the district began its comprehensive communications campaign, *Facts matter: Working together to keep our students safe and healthy* to support the successful implementation of the updated HPE curriculum. Strategies and tactics, including a parent guide, social media campaign and translated documents, maintained a focus on the health and safety of students, incorporating the communication needs of the district’s diverse audiences. For 11 months, the campaign helped communicate, engage and build trust and confidence with key internal and external stakeholders.
Program Overview

Background and Research

Diversity in Peel communities
The Peel District School Board is Canada’s second largest public school board with more than 153,000 students in 250 schools. The district serves 1.3 million residents in three municipalities (Brampton, Caledon and Mississauga) in the Peel Region, located immediately west of Toronto. The region is one of the most diverse, fastest growing regions in Canada, with a population growth rate of 11.8 per cent from 2006 to 2011. Newcomers to Canada made up 80 per cent of this growth. Approximately 100,000 Peel district students speak a language other than English as their primary language at home. Eighty-seven per cent of people in Peel identify with a religious affiliation. The board recognizes and values the cultural and religious diversity within our communities. Together, we work to foster inclusive learning environments.

Once the curriculum was released, misinformation quickly spread through our diverse communities by way of petitions, myths shared by email and on social media, community flyers and meetings at faith centres. News outlets contributed to the misinformation by restating the myths and questioning the ministry’s curriculum—it was the focus of headline news for months.

Commitment to equity and inclusion
The Peel board’s Equity and Inclusive Education Policy reflects the district’s commitment to provide and maintain safe and healthy environments conducive to learning and working for all.

Although the district has done a lot of work to support equity and inclusion for all, it experienced some challenges with equity and inclusion related to the LGBTQ community. Over the past several years, some families chose to exclude their children from school on Day of Pink, the international day to celebrate diversity and inclusion to work towards ending homophobia, transphobia and all forms of bullying and discrimination. The district anticipated the same challenges with the updated HPE curriculum, as it included components that teach about gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation.

Flawed ministry consultation process
On Oct. 30, 2014, school districts received instructions from the ministry related to the distribution of a parent survey addressing the Human Development and Sexual Health Component of the elementary HPE curriculum. Principals were to receive a survey link via email to distribute to a Parent Council representative. This representative was then asked to fill out the survey within two weeks. Tight deadlines made it difficult for school administrators to find a willing parent representative. Once the survey was received, many parent representatives expressed that they did not have enough time to consult with their parent community to collaborate on responses.

In a community as diverse as Peel Region, one parent’s opinion rarely represents an entire school community. In many cases, Parent Council chairs or representatives are not familiar with the HPE curriculum and do not always reflect opinions similar to those in their parent community. As a result, the consultation was not seen as genuine, but rather a flawed process that deliberately excluded parent voice. Consequently, the ministry lost the trust of many parents.

Goal
To support the successful implementation of the updated HPE curriculum in Peel district schools

Objectives
1) To minimize misinformation regarding HPE curriculum amongst Peel parents and communities and
increase awareness of factual information on the HPE curriculum among Peel parents and communities

2) To decrease the volume of negative interactions and feedback from parents and community members by 50 per cent

3) To engage, build trust and gain support of external stakeholders, including support from faith leaders from the four major faiths practiced in the region: Christian, Hindu, Muslim and Sikh

4) To increase awareness of the board’s commitment to equity and inclusion for all students and staff

5) To generate 15,000 page visits to www.peelschools.org/HPE from February 2015 to December 2015

6) To generate one million media impressions for the Facts Matter campaign from February 2015 to December 2015

Analysis/Planning

After considering the cultural and religious diversity of the communities it serves, its commitment to equity and related challenges, and past and present opposition to the implementation of updated HPE curriculum, the Peel board’s Communications department developed a staged, comprehensive, strategic communications campaign: Facts matter: Working together to keep our students safe and healthy.

Consultation with key stakeholders

Trustees and senior administration were consulted to establish key strategies to implement a successful internal campaign, including involving principals and vice-principals early in the campaign to help monitor feedback, and providing template materials to senior and school administration to share key messages and responses. Trustees also requested speaking points and key messages they could use to communicate with and respond to their constituents.

The Peel board’s Communications Advisory Committee, consisting of communications staff, principals and superintendents, provided feedback and input from schools regarding the implementation of a board-wide campaign. They suggested an intranet site be created to share ready-made template materials to help schools communicate with staff and families.

Through the Peel board’s regular Faith Leader Meetings, attended by faith leaders from all of the major faiths practiced throughout the region, we heard that families needed communication materials that were in simple, easy-to-understand language and that they preferred to have translated information, if possible. The faith leaders also provided insight on their respective faith issues related to the HPE curriculum.

Parent members of the board’s Parent Involvement Committee—a board-level committee/super council—was consulted on the board’s communications strategy and draft materials prior to distribution.

Target Audiences

Internal

- senior administration
- trustees
- principals and vice-principals
- classroom teachers
- district curriculum staff

External

- all parents of Peel board students
- parent council chairs and members
- Members of Federal and Provincial Parliament representing parents in the Region of Peel (Mississauga, Brampton and Caledon)
- Minister of Education Liz Sandals
- regional and city councillors within Region of Peel
- local-, ethnic-, Toronto- and Ontario-based media
- education, community and faith leaders/partners
Key messages

- The curriculum is not new and has been taught in Ontario since 1998. Most of the components remain the same.
- Our professional staff teach in a sensitive, age-appropriate manner.
- Parents play a vital role in supporting the curriculum. We want our families to make an informed choice based on facts. Parents will get advance notice of lessons on sexual health and human development.
- Teaching of human development and sexual health is delayed to spring 2016. Teachers will be trained on the updated curriculum leading up to the spring.
- There will be only two to five human development and sexual health lessons per year.
- We will not provide religious or any other accommodation for lessons that build a climate of inclusion and safety, including discussions about different kinds of families or any of the other human rights protected under the Ontario Human Rights Code.
- We want all students to be part of discussions that build respect and understanding, and that help all students feel safe and respected.
- Being, caring, cooperative, honest, inclusive, respectful and responsible are all part of the board’s core values that are taught in Peel classrooms daily.

Budget

The budget for this project was approximately $50,000 USD total, allocated to advertising ($20,000), translation in 11 languages ($15,000), graphic design and printing ($15,000). No staff costs were incurred—all work was undertaken by district employees.

Communication/Implementation

Strategies

The board was faced with the task of developing a thorough understanding of a highly controversial updated HPE curriculum, while simultaneously engaging and building trust with a very diverse group of internal and external stakeholders. The focus of the communication plan was to use factual, consistent messaging to implement the following strategies:

- Create a theme that clearly communicates the need for an updated HPE curriculum. The theme, Facts matter: Working together to keep our students safe and healthy, reinforced the board’s approach to provide the families and communities it serves with the factual information needed to support a curriculum that helps keep all students safe and healthy. This theme worked well with both internal and external audiences. The theme was developed for use in multiple languages and key communications platforms for this campaign: district website, print materials, face-to-face meetings, advertising and social media.
- Use face-to-face meetings with faith community leaders to: share details of the curriculum; respond directly to questions and concerns; gather feedback from the communities; and extend invitations for visits to faith centres to further engage the community in meaningful dialogue.
- Connect the campaign to system goals. The campaign connects directly to the following district goals:
  - Use resources effectively to enhance student achievement
  - Achieve equity for students and staff
  - Encourage positive board/staff and school/community relationships
- Ensure all stakeholders understand that this campaign supports the health and safety of all students. The updates teach students how to deal with current issues related to technology and online behaviour that did not exist when the curriculum was last updated in 1998.
- Assure stakeholders that the board values open, honest, two-way communication among students, staff, parents and the community. We listen and respond to needs, so that everyone is included, recognized and valued.
- Ensure a consistent approach from all 250 Peel schools by creating consistent letter templates and responses for all locations
- Ensure effective communication with diverse audiences by consulting with faith groups and translating materials into top 10 languages spoken by Peel families
- Position the district as an expert in curriculum delivery and a leader in equity and inclusion with both internal and external stakeholders
- Focus on external audiences using template materials and designated spokespersons (Chair of the Board (Trustee), Director of Education, Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction)

**Implementation (in chronological order)**

**February to March 2015 – launch of campaign**
- Developed and shared **key messages/questions and answers** with trustees, senior administration and school administrators shortly after the ministry announced the updated HPE curriculum
- Created dedicated page on the district’s **intranet site** to share ministry resources and internal resources with school administrators
- Created dedicated page on the district’s external website—**www.peelschools.org/HPE**—to share key messages and Ministry resources
- Wrote and sent a letter to Minister of Education Liz Sandals from the Chair of the Board to **share concerns raised by parent communities and school councils** regarding the flawed consultation process for the updated HPE curriculum
- Wrote and distributed a letter to all district families from the Director of Education to **address the updated curriculum and share the board’s key messages and plans for implementation.** The letter was translated in the top 10 languages spoken by Peel families and posted on the district website and all school websites.
- **Monitored and responded to parent feedback** received through social media accounts, email, phone calls and letters received by schools
- Wrote and shared template response letters for schools to respond to parent concerns
- **Designated a senior board staff member to respond** to concerns sent to trustees and/or senior administration. Communications provided **consistent messaging** for responses
- Held special information session for all district trustees to share curriculum information and key messages

**April to June 2015**
- Wrote and provided **formal response letters** and **speaking points** for the Chair of the Board to respond to delegations and questions from parents and community members at board meetings. The question and answer period ran over an hour long at three consecutive board meetings following the release of the curriculum.
- Wrote and sent another letter to Minister of Education Liz Sandals from the Chair of the Board to share additional parent concerns and to request action for parents to get answers.
- Wrote and provided key messages for senior administration, trustees and school administrators to respond to questions regarding a province-wide strike organized by community groups – participating parents planned to keep their children home from school in protest of the updated curriculum. Provided key messages to media as needed.
- Shared curriculum information, key messages and updates with faith community leaders at district’s regularly-scheduled Faith Leader meetings
- Wrote and sent a letter prior to the end of the school year to all families from the Director of Education to directly **address concerns regarding misinformation** circulating in the community and provide an update on implementation work.

**August to October 2015**
- Wrote strong key messages to share the board’s commitment to equity and inclusion. These messages were shared with key stakeholders at the start of the school year in a variety of ways:
Director of Education shared key messages with over 1,000 district staff (trustees, senior administration, school administrators and business, custodial and office staff) during his speech at the district’s start-of-the-year event.

The Director of Education’s keynote address was shared with media. Communications staff followed up with local and ethnic media to maximize exposure.

Wrote and sent a letter was sent to all families from the Director of Education to share key messages and to provide update on our work (teacher training, timing of lessons, parent communication, accommodation request process, parent guide).

- Wrote, designed and produced *Working together to keep our students safe and healthy: a parent’s guide to the revised Health and Physical Education curriculum*
  - Content was written in easy-to-understand language and included key messages that addressed main parent concerns, as well as a breakdown of what students would learn by grade
  - Design was consistent with district brand identity and included contemporary illustrations that reinforced student health and safety
  - Formatted as a folded brochure that expanded into a poster when fully opened
  - Guide was translated, designed and produced in top 11 languages spoken by Peel families. Communications staff ensured translations were clear and accurate to ensure effective delivery of consistent messages to all families.

**November to December 2015**

- Distributed an English version of the guide to all district families and translated versions to families according to the language spoken at home. Digital versions of the guide and all translated versions were posted on district and school websites.
- Crafted a news release for the launch of the guide using key messages, which was then distributed to local and ethnic media outlets. The news release was also accompanied by endorsements from 14 different community and faith organizations, which each included a quote of support. The communications department followed up with any media requests to increase exposure of the guide and endorsements.
- Launched a *Facts Matter advertising campaign* to promote the parent HPE guide and share key messages in over 20 different newspapers, including the major Toronto-area newspaper, local newspapers and ads translated in the top 10 languages spoken by district families placed in ethnic newspapers.
- Implemented a social media campaign on Twitter and Facebook, using the hashtag #FactsMatter. Tweets and posts aimed to debunk myths by providing curriculum facts and directing public to the district website.
- Developed and mailed information packages to politicians, including federal Members of Parliament, Members of Provincial Parliament, Regional Councilors and City Councillors. These packages included:
  - A letter from the Director of Communications and Community Relations Support Services
  - Copies of the parent guide with an option to request additional copies in different languages
- Held video teleconference sessions with all elementary and secondary administrators to share key messages and review operational aspects of implementing the curriculum in schools.
- Created a PowerPoint presentation and script for school administrators to use at parent council meetings.
- Held curriculum information sessions for faith community leaders at the district office to address concerns and provide a detailed overview of the curriculum. District staff attended several local faith centres to conduct information sessions, and shared copies of the parent guide in various languages with participants.
- Created and shared communication materials for superintendents to use at principals meetings.

**Evaluation**

As a result of the campaign, the Peel board met its goal to support the successful implementation of the updated HPE curriculum in Peel district schools. The following outlines the campaign’s success in reference to its objectives:

1) To increase awareness of factual information on the HPE curriculum among Peel parents and communities
2) To decrease the volume of negative interactions and feedback from parents and community members by 50 per cent
Throughout the campaign, the board consistently addressed misinformation about the updated curriculum in all of its communication materials. This resulted in multiple major news outlets addressing the misinformation and including myths and facts as part of their news stories (see supplementary materials). One major newspaper even created an online interactive myths and facts quiz based on our district materials.

As of May 2015, the Peel district no longer had any delegations or questions posed at board meetings related to the HPE curriculum. Schools saw a significant decrease in parent concern letters after receiving the letters from the Director of Education in June 2015 and September 2015. After the parent guide launched in November, there were a total of five parent concern letters received at schools—a significant decrease from the hundreds received a year prior.

3) To engage, build trust and gain support of external stakeholders
As a result of our ongoing communication and interactions with faith leaders at face-to-face meetings throughout the campaign, we were able to build strong relationships with them and their communities based on mutual respect and trust. In November 2015, 14 faith and community groups provided an official endorsement of our HPE parent guide. We shared these endorsements with media, which resulted in major, positive news coverage in major television and print media (see supplementary materials).

In December 2015, Ontario Minister of Education Liz Sandals sent a letter to the Peel board to thank us for our communication efforts in support of the implementation of the updated HPE curriculum (see supplementary materials).

4) To increase awareness of the board’s commitment to equity and inclusion for all students and staff
In September 2015, the Director of Education shared strong key messages on the board’s commitment to equity and inclusion. This resulted in a front-page news story in a major Toronto-area newspaper, which further resulted in more media coverage across the province.

Following the Starting Point event where the Director of Education shared the key messages with over 1,000 Peel staff, members of the LGBTQ community approached the Director to express their appreciation. One staff member commented, “For the first time in my career, I feel included and can just be me.”

5) To generate 15,000 page visits to www.peelschools.org/HPE from February 2015 to December 2015
We promoted the HPE section of the Peel board's site—www.peelschools.org/HPE—in all campaign materials, information sessions and through social media. As a result, the site received over 20,000 hits within a 5-month span.

6) To generate one million media impressions mentioning the Facts Matter campaign from February 2015 to December 2015
The campaign generated over 1.5 million media impressions focusing on the updated HPE curriculum and the Facts Matter campaign in tier one newspapers and television stations. News media ran multiple stories and follow-up stories directly related to the campaign. As the campaign grew, the Peel board positioned itself as a provincial leader in HPE and equity and inclusion, extending our media reach to the provincial level. A selection of media articles can also be found in the supplementary materials section.
Supplementary materials—Background/Research

Negative response re: revised HPE Curriculum

Protest flyers distributed to school communities by concerned parents and community members

Parents and community members held multiple protests at district and government locations. Some families also kept their children home from school as a form of protest.

The following is an excerpt from an email circulated in the Peel community, translated from Arabic. It demonstrates some of the misinformation and myths surrounding the revised curriculum:

- In grade 1 they will learn to reveal their private parts, they will see posters and flash cards of private parts, they will learn to touch the private area, identify it on themselves and on others.

- Children will be challenged to question their gender identity. They will play roles in which they dress and behave like the opposite gender. The teacher will encourage them to experiment being a member of the opposite gender and if they feel comfortable they can adopt that gender irrespective of what they already are physically. Obviously this will breed question and confusion among children. Confusion related to gender identity is recognized as a mental disorder by the American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic & Statistics Manual.

- In grade 7, at age 13, our kids class will learn about how to have anal intercourse oral genital contact (oral sex).

- In Anal Play 101 class in grade 8, they will learn about how to put toys and hand in someone’s butt. In making sex feel good unit, they will be asked to look at sexy magazines and movies to investigate what arouses and seduces them.
PROBLEMS WITH REVISED HEALTH & EDUCATION PROGRAM (HEP)
1. An age inappropriate curriculum
2. Enforces sexual values upon children
3. Encourages child exploitation
4. Encourages child sexual exploration
5. Void of scientific evidence
6. Void of cultural sensitivity
7. No meaningful parental consultation
8. Misleading opting-out solution
9. Obscenity hidden from parents
10. Explicitly graphic AV material enforced
11. Crafted by a convicted child pornographer
12. Teachers are not co-parents
13. Violates Canadian Criminal Code
14. Violates Charter of Rights & Freedoms

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION CLAIMS
- Children’s sexual education needs to be updated to include equality and inclusivity
- Parents do not educate their children about sex

NB. Currently, our Health Care bill that covers STD’s, HIV, pregnancies is sky rocketing

SHARED GOAL
To mobilize hundreds of thousands of parents to WITHDRAW the revised HEP curriculum from public schools, Ontario-wide. This includes: books, materials, guest speakers and any other resources that support this agenda. Demand the previous version of the curriculum.

SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS & STRATEGIES

***MOBILIZATION*** THOUGH THIS COUNCIL Once, this council agrees to the following suggested solutions, mobilization of thousands of parents across Ontario is required. Need to agree on a mobilization method. (Request your name & email please – separate sheet)
Long term: Revise curriculum with REAL parental and leadership representation

(1) MOBILIZE TO EDUCATE!
- Educate, Empower & Mobilize Parents:
  - Parental rights: Training parents to take the reign on sex education. To promote healthier lifestyle based on scientific facts (CG/PEACE)
  - Legal rights: To charge teachers criminally (appendix - Canadian Criminal Code)
- Educate and Empower Children:
  - Define Child / Teacher relationship: Teachers are not a co-parent (CG)
  - Educate children to become constructive rebels and report school activities

(2) MOBILIZE TO OPT-OUT!
Thousands of parents to opt out. Opted out children should be in classes – attended and taught a curriculum that respects. Ensure opted out children are NOT subjected to the sexual agenda.
From 2015 curriculum: Item 264 - Duties of teacher: To inculate by precept and example respect for religion and the principles of Judaeo-Christian morality and the highest regard for truth, justice, loyalty, love of country, humanity…

(3) MOBILIZE FOR LEGAL ACTION (long term)
- Enforce obscenity laws at schools
- Ensure curriculum will not be re-introduced in coming years
- Add Parental Right Act in constitution

(4) MOBILIZE FOR PUBLIC ACTIVITIES
1. Ongoing Rallies
2. Boycott of schools
3. Consistent escalating pressure on MPP’s
4. Charge teachers, criminally
5. Boycott EQAO
6. Letters to trustees, MPP’s
7. Civil disobedience
8. Opting out May for September
Negative media coverage

Below is a selection of news articles that demonstrate the negative perception of the revised curriculum among parents and community members.

Letters from parents

The following are just a few examples of the thousands of letters received from parents expressing their concerns regarding the revised HPE curriculum.

Ref: Optional out of “Sex Curriculum”.

Respected Principal,

I am writing this letter to optional put of immoral “Sex Curriculum” being implemented from September 2015 without parental consent. My child [redacted] studying at Ridgewood Public School. As we live close to this school, our child is expected to stay in this school until grade 5th, so this request is for as long as our child is in this school.

The education minister of Ontario said at Queen Park that parents have right to optional out and her statement was reported in the media widely. I want the school to respect this right and do not expose my daughter to this “Sex Curriculum”. This mean my daughter will not be part of any class, lecture, instructions, graphics, audio or video sessions about this “Sex Curriculum”.

Failing which I reserve the right to take legal course to seek damages from the school, the board, teachers, instructors and other persons violating our optional out right as parents.

I am also requesting you to disclose full information regarding parent consultation process undertaken for this “Sex Curriculum” if any, as I was never consulted about it and there been no communication from the school about it.

Thank you.

With regards,

[Redacted]

Dear Principal, Teachers, and Parents’ Council Coordinator:

We wish to thank the school for its commitment to our child and his/her education. We, as parents, believe in our role as educators for our children. As parents, we are responsible to transfer the values that we believe in and educate them what we think is good for them. We believe that the new Health and Physical Education curriculum contains information that we consider age-inappropriate and do not align with the principles and belief of our family and thousands of other families in Ontario.

As a family, we adhere to a set of values based on our beliefs and culture. We believe that it is our responsibility to teach these values to our children and have the greatest authority over how and when such sensitive topics are being introduced to our children.

As a result, we have decided to join the thousands of other dissatisfied parents and show our displeasure and serious concern about the new curriculum.

Henceforth, we would like to inform you that our child will not be attending the school from May 4 – 8, 2015. You are requested to provide your assignments and other detail that you plan to cover during this period and we will arrange homeschooling for our child during this period. We expect the schools to support parents’ choice and communicate our concerns to the school board and to the Ministry.

Thank you for your respect and understanding.

Sincerely,

[Redacted]
Respected Principal,

I/we am/are concerned parent(s) of

Thank you for your commitment to partner with parents in the education of our children but at the same time do not undermine parental rights. Parents are the first educators.

As we are aware of controversial (Age sensitive) Sex-Ed contents in Ontario’s Revised Health and Physical Education curriculum; which is going to be implemented in schools from September 2015. Besides some good health and physical activities in the curriculum (Grade 1-8), we are very much concerned about updated controversial / age sensitive Sex-Ed contents.

We are requesting to be informed about controversial learning prior to plan instructions. This request applies to all aspects of instruction – curriculum content, supplementary learning material, context of learning, visible signs, graphics etc.

Specifically, I/we wish to have my/our child/children withdrawn from the classroom if the following topics are being taught or discussed in the upcoming and following school years (Grade 1-8).
Grade 1: Sexual body parts, Grade 3: Gender as a changeable social construct and Homosexuality, Grade 4: Romantic dating, Grade 6: Masturbation, Grade 7: Anal intercourse and Oral sex. Others: Pre-marital sex

I am formally asking you to place this letter in my child's Ontario Student Record (OSR) so that there will be no confusion about my wishes. Please acknowledge receipt of this letter in writing at the address below. I trust that you will respect my rights as a parent to choose what is best for my/our child/children.

We need detailed official explanation and confirmation of parental concerns mentioned below.

- Why school did not send parents any information about the upcoming controversial changes in the curriculum which we feel is age inappropriate, sensitive and may affect our children's upbringing?
- Why the survey was only given to School Council Chairs and not to all parents even prior to the curriculum was revealed?
- I (We) demand to separate age sensitive contents from the curriculum and make it as an optional subject for parents who has signed written consent (Opt-in)
- Our child must not be exposed to any controversial/age sensitive material without our consent

In case, our child gets exposed with controversial learning contents in anyway without our consent, it may put School/Board in legal repercussions. To be on a safer side for both, I/we suggest that parents who wants to continue with the new controversial Sex-Ed curriculum must sign consent to opt-in (separate class).

I/(we) respectfully submit these concerns to you as parent(s) and are concerned for my/our child’s education and future. I/(we) would like to discuss this subject in parents’ meeting at your earliest convenience.

We appreciate your written response by date

With profound regards,

Name of Parent(s)

Address:

Phone#
Supplementary materials—Communication/Implementation

Working together to keep our students safe and healthy:
A parent’s guide to the revised Health and Physical Education (HPE) curriculum 2015-16

The parent guide was distributed to all elementary students, and was posted to the district and school websites. The guide was also translated into the district’s top 10 languages and distributed to schools. Copies can be viewed online here:
http://peelschools.org/parents/helpyourchild/curriculum/HPE2015/Pages/default.aspx
The guide unfolds into a poster-sized breakdown of the curriculum by grade level.

**WORKING TOGETHER TO KEEP OUR STUDENTS SAFE AND HEALTHY**

A parent’s guide to the revised Health and Physical Education (HPE) curriculum 2015-16

**What will students learn in each grade?**

**Human development and sexual health:** All aspects of healthy living in the HPE curriculum, focus on helping students learn to make healthy choices (not just avoid potential harmful/unhealthy ways) in their everyday lives.

The lessons in each grade build on each other. Specific grade and development in high school. Students must take one HPE credit, but may choose to take additional HPE courses, which will be taught by grade.

**ELEMENARY SCHOOL**

Grade 1

- Grade 1: What children know the context, nature of their bodies, and their family relationship. They can communicate clearly and freely about feelings and express them. These goals are achieved through hands-on teaching, using tissue.

Grade 2

- Grade 2: Before puberty, helping children to understand that their body will change (e.g., by using baby teeth) can help communicate potential emotional changes (e.g., pain) for a transition.

**SECONDARY SCHOOL**

Grade 9

- **Goal:** Students will learn to identify changes in their bodies and report any changes that seem unusual or harmful.

**What will students learn in each grade?**

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#Factsmatter social media campaign

For 30 days, the Peel district tweeted out facts via its @Peelschools Twitter account, and posted infographics via its Facebook account to debunk some of the myths in the parent community regarding the updated HPE curriculum. Below are examples of social media posts:
Advertisements

A series of advertisements—in English and the district’s top 10 languages—were produced to promote the Facts Matter parent guide, and placed in local, regional and ethnic newspapers.

Facts matter:
Understanding the revised Health and Physical Education (HPE) curriculum

There’s been a lot of information and misinformation circulating about the revised HPE curriculum. At the Peel District School Board, we want our families to make an informed choice based on facts. That’s why we created a neutral, fact-based parent guide that outlines how:

- the curriculum is not new and has been taught since 1998
- our professional staff teach in a sensitive, age-appropriate manner
- parents will get advance notice of lessons
- teaching of human development and sexual health delayed to spring 2016

To read the full parent guide and learn more, visit www.peelschools.org/HPE

The guide is available in the top ten languages spoken by Peel families:

Arabic, Chinese, French, Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi, Spanish, Tamil, Urdu, Vietnamese
March 2015

Dear Peel District School Board Families,

The Ministry of Education recently released its revised Health & Physical Education (HPE) curriculum, which all Ontario schools are required to implement beginning in September 2015. We want to ensure all Peel families have the information they need to help them understand the changes and learn how the curriculum will be taught in the classroom.

We encourage all families to read the ministry’s parent resource documents. They provide an overview of the curriculum by grade level, quick facts and tips for parents to support their child’s learning at home. The ministry resources and full curriculum documents can be accessed on their website at [http://bit.ly/HPEparentresources](http://bit.ly/HPEparentresources).

The curriculum is not brand new, it has just been updated. The majority of the curriculum has been taught in our schools since 1998. Some of the updates reflect current issues that did not exist in 1998, like online behaviour. The Peel District School Board has strongly supported the need for an updated curriculum.

It’s important to note that it is the role of the Ministry of Education to develop curriculum and it is the role of school boards to implement it. The board and its schools have no control over the content of any curriculum document. The ministry will provide training for our staff this spring, which will help guide teachers in their delivery of the curriculum. As a board, we will ensure our teachers have the resources and supports they need.

I can assure you our teachers are committed to teaching the curriculum in a professional and sensitive manner—one that is developmentally and age-appropriate. Our teachers are well-trained professionals who are already teaching human development and sexual health with great sensitivity to the subject matter and their students.

We understand the sensitivity some parents may have regarding the revised curriculum. The board is committed to making sure parents know when curriculum is being taught to their children. We are currently reviewing parent communication regarding curriculum to ensure a consistent and timely process is in place. The board will review the current process to provide parents/students the option to participate to ensure a balance between the rights of parents, the requirements to meet curriculum expectations and the school’s ability to supervise students.

If you have any questions about the updated curriculum and its content, please contact the Ministry of Education at 1-800-387-5514. Questions about how the content will be delivered can be directed to your child’s teacher, principal or vice-principal.

Tony Pontes
Director of Education
Supplementary materials—Evaluation

Parent support

The Toronto Star published a series of letters to the editor from Peel parents who praised the district for speaking out against intolerance over the issue of teaching sex education in schools. Below are a few snippets from Peel parents who supported the district’s efforts:

“Tony Pontes, the director of the Peel School Board, is my new hero. For a politician to stand up to a vocal special interest group and express open opposition, publicly, is rare to the point of unprecedented. … Full credit to Tony Pontes for meeting the opposition to the new curriculum, head on, in Peel.”

“Hooray for Tony Pontes. We are all for diversity and the rights of people from all around the world. Pontes insists that we include the rights of gays, transgendered, etc., and that all Peel students must learn about them. This is not about Canadian values but about human values which Canada has recognized and embraced. Those who insist on equality for themselves and their beliefs must be willing to provide the same to others. To respect the rights of ‘others’ they must know who these ‘others’ are.”

“It is disheartening to read of parents who wish to deny their children the opportunity of learning age-appropriate information about human sexuality. At an appropriate age, young people need to learn to protect themselves from unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases, sexting, etc. Keeping one’s children ignorant is abusive and dangerous.”

View the full article: http://www.thestar.com/opinion/letters_to_the_editors/2015/09/05/standing-up-to-sex-ed-special-interests.html

The Peel district’s Parent Involvement Committee, consisting of parents from across the district, endorsed the Facts Matter campaign and parent guide.

“The Parent Involvement Committee (PIC) for the Peel District School Board (PDSB), comprising of 12 parent volunteers, community and youth representatives from all three cities in Peel, welcomes the curriculum guide as an effective tool for parents to better understand the Health and Physical Education curriculum deliverables; to become partners in ensuring all our youth access living skills that empower and build confidence. We find this guide to be a roadmap that facilitates important conversations at home with our children both in preparation for and after curriculum delivery. We are happy to support this guide further by ensuring its translation into 10 languages most used in PDSB. Let us keep the conversations alive, teaching our children healthy choices.”
Faith and community leader support

The overwhelming support of faith and community leaders resulted in positive local and regional news coverage:

- *Peel sex-ed guide gets imams’ OK* (Nov. 20, 2015)—Brampton Guardian
- *Peel board’s sex-ed guide gets help from faith, community groups* (Nov. 3, 2015)—Toronto Star
- *Peel board sex-ed guide for parents gets approval of local imams* (Nov. 20, 2015)—Toronto Star

The following are a list of endorsements from faith and community leaders in Peel Region:

**Black Community Action Network of Peel**
Sophia Brown Ramsay, Program Manager, Community Development

“The Black Community Action Network (BCAN) is pleased to provide this letter of support to the Peel District School Board (HPE) revised Curriculum 2015-16 Parent Guide. BCAN-Peel is a dynamic collaborative of community residents, as well as organizational partners; it is a group committed to the achievement of social justice and equity. BCAN works to make Peel a safer and more equitable community for children and families to live, work and play. The new HPE curriculum seeks to achieve the same goals; safety and equity through knowledge and acceptance for children/youth in our schools. BCAN supports the parental guide and all efforts which seek to improve the safety and well-being of all children in the Region of Peel.”

**Centre City Medical Clinic**—Dr. V Santhakumar MD, CCFP, Lead Physician

“I find this to be an appropriate step forward to handle this controversial issue and endorse the parent guide as an informative support for the Tamil/any other community. Our clinic serves a large group of Tamil population in Peel region and they need this information to make an informed decision on this matter.”

**Diversity and Inclusion Charter of Peel**—Amrita Kumar-Ratta, Project Lead

“...The parent guide developed by the Peel District School Board responds to the issue in a balanced way; it addresses key concerns by providing factual information about the new curriculum at the same time that it articulates a firm commitment to creating a climate of inclusion and safety for everyone. I fully support the new HPE curriculum and invite parents, families and community leaders to read this (and other ministry-approved) resources and work collaboratively in order to fully understand what the curriculum covers and how it will meet the current needs of our community’s children.”

**Erin Mills United Church**—Kathryn Toivanen, Minister

“I appreciate that the curriculum is comprehensive in its perception of health: health that encourages being active and the development of skills in physical activity and sports; health that includes teaching students social skills and a growing understanding of themselves and others; and health that takes into consideration nutrition, safety, human development and sexual health. In my mind the curriculum offers a holistic understanding of what it means to be healthy and it does so with sensitivity and with respect for the various ages and stages of the students.

The curriculum clearly supports the building up of a healthy body image that will equip children and youth to navigate confidently in a society where there are many pressures from media and others to conform to unreasonable and unattainable images of what it means to be attractive. Providing students with the appropriate knowledge about the way their body grows and matures can help provide a foundation for making wise and safe choices when it comes to interpersonal relationships. ... I am pleased that in age appropriate ways, the curriculum will provide helpful information about gender identity and sexual orientation that will help to reduce stereotypes, myths and stigmas and make our society safer and more inclusive for all.”

**Hindu Federation of Canada/Mississauga Ram Mandir**—Pundit Roopnauth Sharma, President, Hindu Federation of Canada, Founder and Spiritual Leader, Mississauga Ram Mandir

“I feel that this is a very proactive approach that will help to dispel misconceptions and hopefully lead to meaningful benefits to our children.”
**Muslim Imams**—Imam Omar Subedar, Imam Belal Ahmad, Imam Huzaifa Patel, Imam Zahir Bacchus

“We appreciate and applaud the PDSB for their efforts in creating a parent guide for the new curriculum and for accepting our request for a simulated session of the teacher’s workshop that allowed us the opportunity to provide feedback. These types of ongoing engagements will help to alleviate the concerns in regards to the new Health and Physical Education Curriculum, and foster a solid relationship of trust and understanding.”

**Peel Health**—Dr. Eileen de Villa, Medical Officer of Health, Region of Peel

“The revised curriculum is based on sound public health research and is all about keeping students safe, but there has been so much misinformation in the community about it. This Peel board guide will help parents and guardians understand what the curriculum is and is not, and show how teachers and families can work together to help children make healthier choices.”

**Punjabi Community Health Services**—Baldev Mutta, Chief Executive Officer

“It is very important to raise children with knowledge. In today’s world, children need to know about their limits, responsibilities, identify dangers to self and others and become responsible citizens for tomorrow. The teachings and learnings about self, sexual health and responsible behaviours related to sexual health start at a very young age. My own granddaughter attends elementary school in Peel and as a grandfather I fully support the age appropriate curriculum taught in a very responsible manner by qualified teachers.”

**Regional Diversity Roundtable of Peel**—Pamela Opal, Project coordinator

“As a second-generation Punjabi woman who has been raised in Peel and as a professional in the non-profit sector, I can identify with both the hesitancy of the Punjabi community in engaging with the new HPE curriculum and the urgent need for an updated version to be taught to our students. This resource developed by the Peel School Board balances both sides of the issue well, all the while keeping the interests of our young minds at the forefront. The Peel Board addresses parents’ concerns with key proactive strategies while remaining firm on creating a safe, inclusive and equitable school space for all. I encourage parents and other community members to actively engage with the new HPE curriculum by reading factual information as provided through official resources, asking questions and working together to meet the current needs of our students.”

**Senior Tamils Society of Peel**—Arun Anandarajah, President

“This has been a well-planned researched, education program, staggered to suit the students based on their age, development and maturity. This will also help them to understand and clear their ignorance as they grow old and mature.”

**Solel Congregation of Mississauga**—Arliene Botnick, Director of Education

“We are in complete support of the, well researched and age appropriate new Health Education curriculum and fully endorse that it be implemented in Peel schools.”

**United Way of Peel Region**—Shelley White, President and CEO

“United Way of Peel Region supports the PDSB providing parents with the HPE guide so they have accurate information about the curriculum and understand the implementation process so they can make an informed decision about their child’s education.”

**World Sikh Organization**—Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria, VP Ontario

“We fully support this guide. Facts matter, and we believe it is important for parents to make an informed decision about this revised curriculum. The guide is very helpful in that decision making process.”
Ministry of Education support

The Minister of Education wrote a letter of thanks to the Peel district for its efforts to educate parents about the HPE curriculum.

December 15, 2015

Mr. Brian Woodland  
Director of Communications and Community Relations Support Services  
Peel District School Board  
HJA Brown Education Centre  
5650 Hurontario Street  
Mississauga ON L5R 1C6

Dear Mr. Woodland:

Thank you for your letter of November 5, 2015, in which you explain your efforts to educate parents about the updated Health & Physical Education curriculum. I also appreciate that you shared samples of your information materials for parents with me.

I commend your efforts to foster trusting relationships between parents and teaching staff. Parents and educators play critical and complementary roles to support student health, safety and well-being.

As you may know, the Ministry of Education has also developed an extensive series of resources to support parents as they work in partnership with their schools to support learning related to the health and well-being of their children. Our resources are available in multiple languages on our ministry's webpage at:

- Elementary: [www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary/health.html](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary/health.html)

We also created a grade-by-grade breakdown of the Human Development and Sexual Health (sex ed) component of the curriculum, which is available at [www.ontario.ca/hpe](http://www.ontario.ca/hpe).

I trust that some of these materials will be helpful in your efforts to address parents' concerns and misconceptions about the revised HPE curriculum.

Once again, thank you for writing and for your initiative in this important matter. Our children need accurate information and we believe the updated curriculum will help keep our students safe and healthy.

Sincerely,

Liz Sandals  
Minister
Positive media coverage

The following are a selection of media articles and videos regarding the Facts Matter campaign:

**Print**
- *School board trying to ‘debunk myths’ about new sex-ed curriculum* (June 22, 2015)—Brampton Guardian
- *Peel board provides guide to revised sex ed curriculum* (Nov. 4, 2015) – Brampton Guardian
- *Peel school board won’t let religion trump inclusion in controversial sex-ed debate* (Sept. 3, 2015)—Mississauga News
- *Peel parents to receive comprehensive sex-ed curriculum guide* (Sept. 10, 2015)—Mississauga News
- *Peel board won’t exempt kids from learning about gay families, gender issues* (Sept. 2, 2015)—Toronto Star
- *Schools get creative to deal with a wave of sex-ed opt-outs* (Sept. 6, 2015)—Toronto Star

**Online Publications**
- *Peel school board states the facts on new sex education curriculum* (Nov. 4, 2015)—QEW South Post
- *Peel board sending guide on new sex-ed curriculum* (Nov. 6, 2015)—South Asian Daily

**Television and Radio**
- *CBC Radio’s Metro Morning* (April 28, 2015)
  Janet McDougald, chair of the Peel District School Board, speaks with host Matt Galloway about the board’s HPE guide.
- *Peel District School Board debunking Sex-ed myths* (Nov. 4, 2015)—City News
  CityNews reporter Avery Haines on how Peel District School Board has created a pamphlet to break down the myths about the new sexual-education curriculum.
- *Students at Peel public schools won’t be exempt from learning about gay families* (Sept. 2, 2015)—CP24
- *Peel school board to take tough stance on new sex ed curriculum* (Sept. 2, 2015)—Global News Toronto