

IDEOLOGY OVER REALITY

It should be no surprise that Ontario's new Progressive Conservative government scrapped the two-year-old sex-education curriculum and reverted back to a previous, outdated one crafted 20 years ago - before Google, cellphones and sexting.

The change is a reward by Premier Doug Ford to the vocal religious groups and socially conservative family organizations - who helped him win the PC leadership race - that believe teaching sex should be done behind closed doors with little information provided.

These social conservative groups have been emboldened since 2010 when then-premier Dalton McGuinty backed off introducing an updated sex-education curriculum after the success of their virulent campaign of misinformation. When former premier Kathleen Wynne's government installed its sex education curriculum to assist youths navigate the perils of society, these groups accused the government of pursuing a "gay agenda" led by a lesbian.

Despite the hysterical accusations, the Liberals did conduct a full and in-depth consultation process involving about 4,000 parents, principals, educators, police, academics, students, and a variety of organizations, including the Children's Aid Societies and Centre for Addition and Mental Health.

The 1998 sex-education curriculum, which the Ford government had deemed the policy directive for youth starting this September, contains no mention of sex involving anything other than a penis and a vagina. It is retro political ideology gone mad, flying in the face of today's reality.

The sex-education curriculum that was scrapped provided youths with essential information to at least deal with online pornography, the risks of sexting and photo sharing, how to stand up to cyber bullying, how to respond to uncomfortable situations, how to grow up with a clear understanding of consent in sexual situations and urges abstention or at least a delay in sexual activity.

It also promotes diversity and inclusiveness, especially in a transforming society where a youth may have two mothers or two fathers. The curriculum is not a how-to manual, as some irate and misinformed socially conservative groups may say, but a harm-reduction document that educates, informs and includes.

Education Ministry Lisa Thompson and her parliamentary assistant, the socially conservative Niagara West PC MPP Sam Oosterhoff, say they will consult with Ontario parents with the idea of establishing a new curriculum in September 2019. But the PCs are in no hurry to review the sex education curriculum when they already have a document in place that is a detriment to youths as they try to learn about a complicated world.

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POVERTY IS A REALITY HERE IN HALTON

MORE THAN 13,500 CHILDREN LIVE IN LOW-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS, WRITES SABIHUDDIN



SARAH SABIHUDDIN
Column

Imagine having to choose between buying diapers and food or paying the rent and hydro bill.

In Halton, there are more than 13,500 children living in low income households, representing 10.5 per cent of all children in our community. That is one in 10 kids living in poverty right here in our neighbourhoods.

This is why organizations like the Halton Poverty Roundtable (HPRT) are so important. Our members are regional change-makers who are challenging the complexity of poverty in our community. We work to shed light on all aspects of poverty and highlight the reality of poverty in our neighbourhoods. Through connecting, educating and acting together, we aim to reach the ultimate goal of eliminating poverty in Halton.

Over the course of the past eight years, the HPRT has been involved in raising public awareness on issues ranging from social assistance reform, to increasing awareness on available housing supports, to the successful inclusion of community benefits in publicly-funded infrastructure projects directly impacting low-income residents.

Poverty looks different in every community, and Halton is no exception.

Poverty is a complicated topic to define, but even harder to solve. Halton residents living in poverty often have unstable employment, insecure and unaffordable housing, are food insecure, face chronic health issues, experience financial barriers to post-secondary education, and face social exclusion due to the gap that exists between the highest and lowest income earners in

our community. A family of four with two adults working full time must earn a minimum of \$17.95 an hour to pay for the basic necessities of life so they can live with dignity and participate as active citizens in our society. Many in our community have to decide between paying their rent, buying fresh food for their children, and paying for necessary medication.

Halton Poverty Roundtable believes that everyone in our community should be adequately housed, with enough income to meet the most basic standard of living, allowing everyone to eat properly, live with less stress and engage with community supports.

If you, or someone you know, want to become more involved in achieving our vision of 'No Neighbour in Need' please check out our website at www.haltonpovertyroundtable.com or on twitter @HaltonPovertyRT.

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