

Parents, teachers protest sex-ed curriculum



By Brock Weir

Students across Ontario returned to classrooms this week, but while some parents were busy dashing around getting last minute clothes and supplies so their kids start the year off right, others descended on the office of MPP Chris Ballard last week to try to get one item crossed off the Province's back-to-school agenda.

Dozens of parents, some teachers, some pastors, and some with their own children in tow, arrived, placards in hand, at the Wellington Street East office of Mr. Ballard demanding two things ? a reversal on the Province's controversial changes to its health and sex-ed curriculum and, barring that, gaining what they feel should be a larger parental voice around the table in how this curriculum could be administered.

The revisions are an overhaul of a nearly 20-year curriculum covering wide-ranging topics, including teaching the anatomical names of genitalia in Grade 1, to introducing concepts of consent in older grades.

For those protesting along Wellington Street last week, it was too much too soon.

?I told my kids in the car on the way over here that I was coming because it was curriculum that was going to teach them things about sex I didn't agree with and I wanted to make sure that people, even if it goes through, [know] that we don't agree with everything that is being taught,? said Olga McElroy, a Grade 7 teacher.

?I think my biggest concern with it being brought in this year is that so many people have been pushing back, questioning and wanting to know more. We're getting the message it is going through anyway and that, to me, in a democratic process, is not acceptable. I don't see how a government can hear all of the protests and all of the concerns and just say, ?too bad' even though it is afflicting kids who don't have a voice and aren't of voting age. They're talking about hundreds of thousands of kids in this province who can't say they're uncomfortable so we, as their parents, are trying to say, ?Wait. Look more into it.?

The argument kids would be uncomfortable with the new curriculum was a common theme offered by the protestors, including Dave, who said he has had two daughters go through the existing elementary school sex-ed curriculum.

?Kids are naturally modest,? he said. ?[My daughters] have both been very uncomfortable with the current sex-ed curriculum because it is taught in a mixed-gender environment and they're not even allowed to ask questions. They are naturally modest and shy about these things. My daughter has already asked to be exempt from the Grade 7 and Grade 8 curriculum because she is so uncomfortable with some of the things that are coming up. Kids aren't out there wanting to talk about their body parts and what to do

with them.?

Parents also objected to the new curriculum introducing the concept of gender identity to students. ?Teaching gender as a social construct? to Grade three students was ?simply ridiculous? they offered.

?They are born one or the other,? added Dave. ?There might be .001 per cent of the population that is afflicted by that disorder and they should be treated accordingly, but not all kids are out there wondering whether they are a boy or a girl or whether they can grow up and be one or the other. That is just social engineering we don't want our kids to go through.?

For another parent, Philip, the issue of teaching the concept of consent brought up several emotions as he spoke alongside his daughters.

?One thing I am hearing is if somebody actually has more awareness they can actually stop someone from raping them, but a rapist doesn't care about consent,? he said. ?We teach our daughters what is not acceptable for somebody to touch them and so forth, so we set the boundaries, so someone who is going to rape a kid is going to rape a kid regardless of whether they tell them not to or whatever it is. There are sick people in this world and that is why we have to have boundaries to protect our children.

And, it is parents themselves ? or, at least the parents protesting ? who want to set these boundaries and be the first on the scene to teach their children these concepts when and where they feel it is appropriate.

?I am concerned that the parents are the primary educators of the children and the government should stick with their own areas,? said Diane Wood. ?I believe in subsidiarity where I am happy to have the government come in and clean off the roads and I will pay for that, but I don't want them cleaning my driveway. I can take care of my own driveway and everything from the road into my house. I want to take care of my own house, my own children, give them my values and not whoever's values they're trying to teach.?

She conceded, however, there might be some parents in Ontario not willing to step up to the plate and teach their kids the important facts of life when it is truly needed and that is something she is trying to address through a guide she has created for parents and speaking engagements on the subject.

?I do know our government is concerned that parents aren't doing their job, so I am trying to work towards being able to do it. ?I think the new curriculum goes into too many areas we don't need to go into with the children at too young of an age, such as masturbation. I am worried about when the child is ready. Each child should be taught one on one because there is a natural tendency to be innocent and once they are ready for things they will ask and the parents will know when they are ready. I am concerned that the parents aren't doing their job, but maybe this is the catapult we need to get that going and get more parents on board.?