

Provincial Consultation on Education in Ontario: Ophea and OASPHE Formal Submission November 2018

Provincial Consultation on Education in Ontario

On September 28, 2018, the Government of Ontario launched a [provincial consultation process](#) where stakeholders – parents, students, educators, and interested individuals and organizations – were invited to provide feedback on the education system in Ontario through any of the three platforms available: open submission, online survey, and regional telephone town halls. The consultation process will run until December 15, 2018. The overall goal of these consultations is “to prepare Ontario students for success, improve their academic achievement, and equip them with the tools needed to enter the working world” (<https://www.ontario.ca/page/for-the-parents>).

About Ophea and OASPHE

Ophea and OASPHE are the provincial subject associations for Health and Physical Education and recognize that the Ontario Health and Physical Education curriculum has the potential to positively impact the health of 2 million Ontario students by helping them develop the knowledge and skills to become healthy, productive citizens. Both organizations share an extensive history of supporting all 5,000 schools, 72 school boards, 35 public health units and 13 teachers’ colleges, with ongoing implementation support for all aspects of Health and Physical Education in Ontario’s publicly funded school system.

How to use this Information

Ophea and OASPHE have responded through the Government of Ontario’s consultation process and felt that releasing responses related to physical, emotional, and mental health and well-being may help support others in their participation of the consultation process. We encourage everyone to participate in any or all three of the consultation methods: [open submission, online survey, telephone town hall](#).

We encourage those seeking help articulating their perspective to reference from the below evidence-informed responses. These responses are reflective of the health-related questions from the [open submission](#) and the [online survey](#). Questions related to technology, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math), and skilled trades are also included in the consultation process.

Open Submission Consultation Questions – Health and Physical Education-Related Questions Only

How can we build a new age-appropriate Health and Physical Education curriculum that includes subjects like mental health, sexual health education and legalization of cannabis?

Ontario students have a right to learn from an up-to-date, research-based Health and Physical Education curriculum that includes human development and sexual health education, and addresses current issues including online safety, consent, self-esteem, mental health, cannabis, healthy relationships, respect for others, diversity and equity. The curriculum should reflect **all** students including those with visible / invisible differences as protected through the *Ontario Human Rights Code* and related provincial policies such as *Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* and reflect the standards in *Ontario's Education Act* and UNESCO's *Education for All*. The concepts addressed within the curriculum should be based on a foundation of physical literacy and health literacy to support students to develop the knowledge and skills they need to lead healthy, active lives.

In regards to how an updated curriculum should be built, following this provincial consultation process all proposed curriculum revisions should be validated for age-appropriate content, as well as scope and sequence of learning by organizations with subject-matter expertise. Specifically, the Government of Ontario should consult with internationally and nationally recognized organizations that have conducted extensive research and evaluation to develop up-to-date standards that are scientifically accurate and use evidence-based teaching methods.

Within the context of sexual health education, these standards include:

- [Draft Core Principles of Sexual Health Education for Canadians](#) (Sex Information and Education Council of Canada, 2018)
- [International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education: An Evidence-Informed Approach](#) (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization – UNESCO, 2018)

When an updated Health and Physical Education curriculum has been finalized and is ready for implementation, school boards, schools, teachers' colleges and public health units need to be supported through evidence-informed approaches to implementation, including coordinated development and delivery of teaching resources, professional development, aligned communications between government and educational stakeholders, and ongoing evaluation of implementation. Easy, reliable, and equitable access to current and practical resources for both educators and parents is necessary to help them understand the curriculum and support its implementation. Proactively

thinking beyond curriculum development to implementation is critical to ensure that once this curriculum is built its potential to positively impact the lives of two million children and youth attending Ontario public schools is realized in time for the beginning of the 2019 / 2020 school year.

Beyond the classroom setting, students are better able to be healthy and perform academically when attending a school that adopts a comprehensive school health approach. This approach is validated internationally through the World Health Organization and embedded in Ontario's education system through provincial policies and strategies including the *Foundations for a Healthy School Resource* and *Public Health Standards*. This approach considers the value of the school community – including educators, parents and community partners – working together to reinforce what is taught in the Health and Physical Education curriculum and support overall student health and well-being, leading to future professional and personal success. While many schools already make this connection, explicit connections to comprehensive school health in the Health and Physical Education curriculum would support schools in making strong and consistent connections.

What can be done to ensure students graduate high school with important life skills, including financial literacy?

In a classroom setting, the goals of the Health and Physical Education curriculum focus on supporting students in developing important life skills necessary to be active and healthy throughout their lives by fostering physical literacy and health literacy. These life skills (e.g., critical and creative thinking skills, personal and interpersonal skills) are applicable across a variety of physical education and health areas (e.g., mental health, substance use, physical activity, healthy eating) and are transferable to securing and maintaining employment post-education and becoming a productive member of society. Ontario's education system needs to help students build the necessary skills to become healthy, engaged, and prosperous citizens that can deal with the inevitable challenges of work and life. The Health and Physical Education curriculum can be a major contributor to this goal and should be a valued component of a student's overall education from kindergarten through secondary school.

Specifically as it relates to financial literacy, there are multiple opportunities to integrate financial literacy into the Health and Physical Education curriculum. When exploring topics such as healthy eating, substance use, misuse and abuse, mental health, and personal relationships, students can begin to make connections to how both personal and financial decisions have an effect on their overall health and well-being. For example, healthy eating could be addressed in the classroom by using real-world scenarios such as how to make healthy choices by reflecting on personal food selections, practicing comparison shopping, creating healthy menus on a budget and looking at different foods based on nutritional value and price. Understanding the role advertising plays in influencing their food choices is a powerful step to becoming savvy consumers and helps students identify ways of promoting healthy eating.

A comprehensive approach to Health and Physical Education that reflects the diverse reality of student's lives and potential futures facilitates cross-curricular connections with other subjects such as media literacy and numeracy, further reinforcing important life skills.

What measures can be taken to improve provincial standardized testing?

As the current provincial standardized testing model is reviewed and revised by the Government of Ontario, consistent, ongoing, and effective assessment of student knowledge and skills to be physically active and to make healthy choices should be integrated as a critical indicator alongside traditional literacy and numeracy scores. The research is clear: healthy students are better prepared to learn and education is a key determinant of health. Recognizing student health and well-being as a goal for education in Ontario recognizes its fundamental importance to student learning and sets them up for engagement in the future.

Evidence demonstrates how interconnected student health is with overall student engagement and achievement. If we want our students to excel in literacy and numeracy and build needed job and life skills, their health cannot be ignored. With the growing number of students suffering from mental health and other connected health issues, schools need to be a place where students continually feel safe and supported academically, physical, and emotionally.

The Government of Ontario should consider exploring indicators and existing data that could be monitored and evaluated on an ongoing basis to provide current snapshots and long-term health behaviours and outcomes of Ontario's students. Evidence should be able to provide local, regional, provincial, national, and internal comparisons and be monitored consistently over time to ensure that students are being equipped with the healthy living skills they need to succeed.

What elements should be included in a Ministry of Education Parents' Bill of Rights?

Within the context of Health and Physical Education, like many other subject areas, the delivery of information should be a shared responsibility that respects the roles of parents, teachers, and the students themselves. Parents are responsible for teaching their children values, beliefs, and traditions, as well as supporting their overall education, while educators are responsible for effective instruction in a safe, caring, and inclusive environment. Students are responsible for their education, including taking responsible risks, communicating, managing their behaviour, persisting in their efforts at school, and applying their skills. Providing opportunities for parents, students, and educators to engage in ongoing, productive dialogue to support students is critically important. A Parents' Bill of Rights could provide guidance on building strong relationships between home and school, including highlighting existing opportunities for parents to become more engaged in their school community, and effective use of parent

groups such as parent councils and Parent Involvement Committees (PICs), and leverage *Parents in Partnership: A Parent Engagement Policy for Schools*.

A Parents' Bill of Rights should be developed in alignment with the Ontario Human Rights Code (www.ohrc.on.ca/en/ontario-human-rights-code) to ensure the rights and responsibilities of parents **and** students from all families are reflected based on protected grounds (e.g., ethnicity, race, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation). All students and their families should have the opportunity to see themselves reflected in curriculum and educational policies and practices, including a Parents' Bill of Rights should ensure they feel safe and accepted in their school community.

Survey Consultation Questions – Health and Physical Education-Related Questions Only

How do we ensure school aged children are getting the required amount of physical activity each day?

According to the *Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines*, school-aged children should accumulate at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity each day. This can be achieved through a combination of Daily Physical Activity (DPA), which is 20 cumulative minutes of physical activity each school day (exclusive of days where students are already physically active in a Health and Physical Education class), along with quality Health and Physical Education (H&PE) minutes, active free play at recess or after school, active transportation to and from school, and through participation in quality intramural and interschool activities.

In order to enable schools to facilitate these quality opportunities, it is critical that we build the confidence and competence of administrators and teachers to deliver quality experiences across the school day. This can be achieved by ensuring school boards and schools are supported in the implementation of the DPA and H&PE policies through evidence-informed approaches to implementation, including coordinated development and delivery of teaching resources, professional development, ensuring appropriate facilities and scheduling, aligned communications between government and educational stakeholders, and ongoing evaluation of implementation.

Beyond the classroom setting, students are better able to become healthy and be physically active when attending a school that adopts a comprehensive school health approach. This approach is validated internationally through the World Health Organization and embedded in Ontario's education system through provincial policies and strategies including the *Foundations for a Healthy School Resource* and *Public Health Standards*. This approach considers the value of the school community—including educators, parents and community partners – working together to reinforce what is taught through health promoting curricula and policies and support overall student health and well-being, leading to future professional and personal success.

Connections to the comprehensive school health approach can be made directly within the Health and Physical Education curriculum and have the potential to reinforce quality physical activity opportunities at touch points across the school day: recess, before and after school, when travelling to and from school, and during intramural and interschool activities.

Additional Health-Related Questions in Online Survey

Ophea and OASPHE were pleased to see some of the questions incorporated into the survey on key health topics including the introduction of different sexual health topics, trusted sources for sexual health information, cannabis, alcohol, and healthy decision-making included in the online survey. Ophea has regularly conducted parent surveys to better understand what families want their children to learn in the classroom and what's most important to them when it comes to Health and Physical Education and the promotion of well-being in school communities. To access results from the most recent surveys, please visit:

- [2017 Parent Opinion Poll Infographic](#)
- [2017 Parent Opinion Poll Full Report](#)
- [2013 Parent Opinion Survey Summary of Findings](#)

In addition to public opinions provided as part of the Government of Ontario's consultation process, Ophea and OASPHE strongly recommend that international standards and health professionals should be heavily consulted during the curriculum revision process to ensure that what is being taught in Ontario schools is safe and age-appropriate. For their health and safety, it is critical that students have the information and skills they need to make sound health choices before they are faced these decisions. Key standards include:

- [Draft Core Principles of Sexual Health Education for Canadians](#) (Sex Information and Education Council of Canada, 2018)
- [International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education: An Evidence-Informed Approach](#) (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization – UNESCO, 2018)
- [Quality Physical Education Guidelines for Policy-Makers](#) (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization – UNESCO, 2015)
- [Sexual Health Key Finding Fact Sheet](#) (Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children – HBSC, 2016)