We’re a group of concerned students at Victoria High School and our school experience has shown that sexual health education in BC schools is insufficient. We’re in twelfth grade, which means that we have been through 13 years of public schooling, and our experiences with sex-ed have ranged from awkward, to minimal, to simply non-existent. We have spent the last four months working towards finding solutions to this problem.  As mature students, we think that we should have a say in how sexual education is presented and have an opportunity in class to discuss topics that are relevant.  BC’s Ministry of Education is developing a new curriculum and our Social Justice 12 class has been dissecting it.  It needs to be improved.

When it comes to sexual health education, internet pornography and Youtube can be dangerous sources of information, and an educator with a bias against sexual activity before marriage may provide incorrect information and possibly create a negative environment. What we need is an objective ?teacher educator to give us unbiased, comprehensive information in a safe environment that encourages questions and discussion. We are currently not receiving the information we need given the sexual complexities of the 21st century.

With the help of BC Speaks, we’ve been working through the draft curriculum and making suggestions for changes.  We’ve spoken with Mayor Lisa Helps, MLA’s Rob Fleming, Carole James, Maurene Karagianis and Andrew Weaver, Focus Magazine editor Leslie Campbell and the Superintendent of SD61 Piet Langstraat. We have also been in contact with professional sexual health educators and interviewed by CTV. We’ve had positive feedback and gained support from people both inside and outside of the school district and are now looking for support from the public.

Here’s how we would improve the sexual health component of the new curriculum:

·         **Incorporate concept of consent at every grade level**- the term ‘consent’ does not appear anywhere in the new curriculum.

·         **Emphasize respect**- sexual education is more than learning about body parts and sexual intercourse.  It’s about learning to be a good person and to treat others with respect.

·         **Create an inclusive environment and attitude** – inclusivity and comprehension are two important principles that need to be brought to the foreground of any curriculum expansion.

·         **All classes K-12 should be co-ed-**We all need to understand each other better.

·         **Increase the time spent on sexual health education** – one class per year is not sufficient to deal with all the complexities of the topic.  Many questions are left unanswered, or are ‘informed’ by poor sources such as internet pornography.

·         **Create a sexual health education curriculum for Grades 11 and 12** - there is currently no sexual education curriculum for Grades 11 and 12.

·         **Create a new course on Human Wellbeing** - Eating and anxiety disorders, gender issues, on-line bullying and communication in the digital world are all important and relevant issues to students in the 21st Century.

 The general tone of sexual education is, and always has been, infused with warning, shame and fear.  A realistic and more positive approach would include discussions about intimacy, romance and the pleasurable aspects of responsible, physical contact. If you want our attention in class, let’s balance the negativity with some positivity.

 Recently, MLA Andrew Weaver tabled a bill that was brought forward as government Bill-23 to include standardized protocols for reporting sexual-assault at the post-secondary level. You can’t expect to have a conversation about sexual assault at a university level without introducing the concept in grade school. A more inclusive sexual health education program beginning in kindergarten and continuing through twelfth grade would create a more understanding and respectful generation. We believe that inadequate sexual health education in grade school can lead to the frequency of sexual assaults that required the passing of this Bill in the first place.

Speaking in the Legislature on May 10 about our class’ efforts, MLA Weaver said: “We are in good hands when the next generation recognizes that there is an issue in our society for which solutions exist and they’re willing to stand up and be part of forming those solutions and disseminating them through others.” (Hansard)

 The introduction to the new curriculum states: “The world is changing and we need to change too.”  This has never been more true than in the area of sexual, emotional, mental and physical health.  Our future depends on our education system. We are ready for change, are you?

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