

April 12, 2022

**“When parents are left in the dark, vulnerable children in classrooms suffer.
We must stop the damage”**

Students are back in class across Alberta, and parents are once more feeling alienated from their children's lives while they are at school. This is made critically evident by the sudden influx of communications to *Parents for Choice in Education* (PCE).

Most recently, concern has arisen about an 'opt-out' form offered to parents in a central Alberta school regarding a student health and sexual education program. It stated in bold, underlined lettering: **“If this form is not returned to the main office before that date, your child will be included in the info sessions.”**

Ironically, the program was a 50-minute presentation about “components of consent, myths about consent, who to talk to for support in the school and outside the school.”

This is not a question of what should be taught in schools. It is, truly, a matter of [consent](#). Parents, as primary educators and caregivers of their own children must be informed of and give consent when sensitive content related to sexuality is presented to their children at school.

While most would agree that consent is an essential lesson for everyone, there are several valid reasons that parents might choose to remove their children from such lessons. These reasons may include a parent's awareness of their child's past trauma, mental health concerns, and developmental capacity.

A commitment guiding their own children in sensitive topics also lets them show that they are always available to their children in times of concern and ensures the quality of teaching on these subjects.

Indeed, parents may not see a notification form. School emails can easily go to spam folders, or be lost in a welter of data. Physical forms often do not make it home either. Backpacks are messy places, and children may feel obliged to attend through peer pressure or innocently not wanting to be perceived as different (by being removed from a lesson) and therefore hide these forms outright. Intentionally or accidentally, omission happens.

As a result, parents can easily be left in the dark regarding sensitive content presented to their children, and PCE has heard of children being harmed as a result.

To be fair, this school was following the minimum guidelines of [Alberta's Education Act \(58.1\)](#) which requires that parents and guardians be notified of lessons, projects, units, resources, or courses of study that deal explicitly and primarily with religion and human sexuality. Alberta Education doesn't currently ask for consent – but it should.

When parents are left in the dark, vulnerable children in classrooms suffer. We must stop the damage – and

that means it is time for genuine consent to be the legislated guideline.

Parents, if you want back into your children's lives in school you need to get engaged in several ways.

First, [join PCE in insisting that the Alberta government amend the Education Act](#) in such a way that whenever content around human sexuality, religion, and gender is being offered to your children you must be fully informed up front. That means an opt-in form, not an opt-out. Full consent, not just notification, must be the measure for schools.

Second, until legislation is amended, go into your school and insist that you be informed each and every time your child will be offered content of a sexual or religious nature. Let your child's teacher know that nothing short of your fully informed consent must be procured prior to your child's participation.

Finally, ask your child's teachers to provide the full lesson, not just the outline, so you know how the content is being taught, and by whom, thus allowing you to support such lessons or fully teach the content to your child yourself. This would genuinely ensure that every child's particular needs are met while also ensuring no child is left behind.

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