

The Blob, coming for your children in Alberta?

By John Hilton O'Brien, 8 October 2022

Premier-elect Danielle Smith cut her political teeth as a school board trustee who was willing to make waves. And in an educational world of drag queen story hours and giant prosthetic breasts, we need a premier with that kind of heart.

However, Smith has her work cut out for her. UK Education Minister Michael Gove once called the education establishment “[The Blob](#),” in homage to the science fiction movie monster that devoured all in its path. The Alberta Teachers’ Association (ATA), the Faculties of Education, and the bureaucracies of the province and local boards have overlapping interests — and they aren’t the same as parents and children. Smith must learn to work with a very powerful educational establishment that can thwart her.

Smith’s political capital is also limited, and she knows it. Her gracious acceptance speech was all about reconciliation. The only fights she picked were with the Opposition, the Prime Minister, and with AHS over ambulances and hospital beds — safe targets, narrowly focussed. A big fight with The Blob is not in her plans.

But she’s not powerless, and there are three areas where she can take action.

The first area is easiest: funding. It is something she touched on in a Parents for [Choice in Education leadership forum](#), and again in her October 6th acceptance speech. She floated the idea of using a [hybrid model for funding](#), to allow incentive-based funding for independent and Charter schools. She

also plans to put more [aides in classrooms](#), and [tutors to help](#) with learning deficits due to Covid. She will have to use care to keep the bulk of that money going to classrooms and actually benefiting students, as opposed to the Blob devouring it with no real results to show.

Secondly, Smith wants to deal with [Kenney’s stalled curriculum reform](#). She pointed out that it received a lot of extra “pushback” because he cut the ATA out of the [curriculum development process](#). However, [The Blob has interests](#) that are counter to reform: Letting it devour the curriculum reform seems like a bad idea. The best way to thread the needle between the interests of parents and those of the educational establishment is to return to the [2020 Guiding Framework for the design of the curriculum](#), a solid document which set the spirit of the reform before it was marred by poor execution.

Finally, Smith must do something about parental rights in the education system. On August 4th, she told the PCE forum she was stunned that the attempt to create safe spaces with Gay-Straight Alliances had resulted in sexual education material targeted at [inappropriate ages](#).

From a parent’s perspective, however, the sexualized material — however inappropriate — is not the biggest issue.

The problem with gender studies and similarly-themed clubs is that they’ve been used as an excuse to [cut parents](#)

[out](#) of communication on critical issues with their children. In a similar fashion, Critical Race Theory uses the image of oppressed peoples to [take power away](#) from students and their parents. The incoming premier needs to understand that many parents feel the educational establishment is taking away their right to parent their own children, and they are angry. If Smith wants to have peace in her house, she needs to fix this.

Smith proposed a stepped approach to sexual education, which would see ideas about attraction and gender identity restricted to senior high school. That will help. However, the [ATA’s Prism Toolkit](#) contains legal arguments to assure teachers that on their reading of FOIP, the Alberta Human Rights Act, and the Education Act, activist teachers don’t have to inform parents at any grade, let alone seek permission. A convincing solution means amending the existing pieces of legislation, so that together they say what she means them to say.

The net effect is that Smith must be very, very cautious about education. She simply can’t afford to fight Alberta Health and The Blob. But if she’s persuasive and careful — and she can be very persuasive — she just may finish the job that Kenney couldn’t complete.

John Hilton-O’Brien is the Executive Director of [Parents for Choice in Education](#)