



August 28, 2023

Sexual Assault Services of Saskatchewan opposes Ministry of Education's New Parental Inclusion and Consent Policies

For immediate release - Sexual Assault Services of Saskatchewan (SASS) expresses deep disappointment in the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education's new Parental Inclusion and Consent Policies", announced on Tuesday, August 22.

SASS member agencies across Saskatchewan not only provide critical crisis support for survivors of sexual violence, but also community-based sexual health education that addresses norms perpetuating sexual violence.

"SASS and our member agencies strongly oppose any policy that is anti-trans and compromises sexual health education programming," said SASS Executive Director Kerrie Isaac. "These policies are not designed to help Saskatchewan students. Instead, they undermine fundamental human rights and contribute to an unsafe and discriminatory educational environment. Policies like these are against the principles of equality, respect, and personal autonomy and are often politically motivated."

The United Nations identifies comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) as "critical for the health and survival of young people".¹ CSE is characterized as scientifically accurate and age-appropriate information on sexuality, sexual and reproductive health. Delivery of CSE curriculum within schools is associated with improved health outcomes, decreased strain on the health care system, promotion of healthy relationships, and prevention of sexual and intimate partner violence.² This is critical given that Saskatchewan has the second highest rate of sexual violence victimization among provinces at 103.94 incidents per 100,000, double the national average.³ Saskatchewan research indicates that more half (53.9%) of these sexual assault experiences occurred between the ages of 13-24. Sexualized violence of children and youth occurred most often in their homes (34.4%) and within friendship circles (47.2%).⁴ CSE within schools provides protective measures for both the prevention of sexual violence, and safe spaces for students to disclose experiences of violence, thus leading to appropriate and timely interventions.

¹ World Health Organization. (2023). Comprehensive Sexuality Education. Retrieved from <https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/comprehensive-sexuality-education>

² United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. (2018). *International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education*. Paris, UNESCO. Retrieved from <https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/9789231002595>

³ Conroy, S., & Cotter, A. (2017). Self-reported sexual assault in Canada, 2014. *Juristat*, 37(1). Statistics Canada catalogue no. 85-002-X.

⁴ Umereweneza, P., Lovrod, M., Findlay, I., Giesbrecht, C., Valle-Castro, M., Mason, N., Anaquod., & Hoffart, R. (2020). *Sexual Violence in Saskatchewan: Voices, Stories, Insights, and Actions from the Front Lines*. Saskatoon: Community-University Institute for Social Research.

“Our ability to engage with young people through the educational system is being revoked, significantly limiting students’ access to comprehensive sexual health education, which includes vital information and guidance on sexual violence,” said PARTNERS Family Service Executive Director Hayley Kennedy. This ban will affect critical relationships built between our member agencies and local schools that ensures collaborative community approaches to violence prevention. This is particularly troubling for rural and remote communities, where access to government health professionals is practically non-existent, and finding healthcare experts with relevant experience in this field is equally challenging.

Moreover, this decision was made less than two weeks before the commencement of the school year across the province. This timing adds more strain on educators, who are already under considerable demands. Comprehensive sexual health education is multifaceted, and schools have frequently sought support from SASS member agencies to augment the mandated curriculum. Therefore, not only are students being denied access to essential information, but teachers are also being deprived of valuable tools that enhance their classroom instruction.

“Comprehensive sexual health education is a critical component of youth education. The contributions of outside experts and agencies provide clear, factual, unbiased and age-appropriate information to students. We share Sexual Assault Services of Saskatchewan’s deep disappointment over the removal of these valuable services, which supports our province’s teachers in meeting the goals of the approved Saskatchewan Curriculum. The provincial curriculum is designed to support students in making healthy decisions,” said Samantha Becotte, President of the Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation.

On July 25, 2023, the province announced a historic bilateral agreement of \$20.3 million over four years to support the implementation of the National Action Plan to End Gender-based Violence (GBV) in Saskatchewan. A minimum of 25 per cent of funding allocation is directed towards primary prevention approaches that address the root causes of GBV, including school and community-based approaches to educate children and youth. Minister Duncan’s new policies undermine the goals of the National Action Plan and the years of expert collaborations built with schools in urban, rural, remote, and northern communities across the province.

“As documented in the *Learning is Healing Report*, SASS research demonstrates that third-party sexual health education is necessary to refuse the trajectories of wilful ignorance which would mark yet another generation with the scars of political expediencies that play on people’s prejudices and the need to control and own children in ideological ways that interfere with their capacities to correct the errors of past generations. Targeting comprehensive sexual health education means that another generation of Saskatchewan youth will grow up thinking that sexual violence is a rite of passage and placing another generation of perpetrators in power,” said Dr. Marie Lovrod, Principal Investigator of the Saskatchewan Sexual Violence Education Initiative Research and Program Chair of Women’s and Gender Studies at the University of Saskatchewan.

Policies that discriminate against transgender persons perpetuates a cycle of prejudice and exclusion. Saskatchewan schools should be safe spaces for all students to learn and express themselves without fear, discrimination, or harm.

Providing comprehensive sexual health education supported by community-based subject matter experts is one of many critical steps necessary to promoting safer communities and achieving a reality where every child and youth in Saskatchewan lives free from the threat, fear, or experience of sexual violence.

-30-

For More Information:

SASS – Sexual Assault Services of Saskatchewan

Kerrie Isaac

306-757-1941

kerrie@sask.ca

sask.ca