



November 24, 2022

Ref: 285208

Christine Perkins, Superintendent
School District No. 22 (Vernon)
Email: cperkins@sd22.bc.ca

Dear Christine Perkins:

I am writing to mark the beginning of this year's 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence and highlight the important role of K-12 teachers, staff, administrators, trustees, and advocates in creating systemic change to reduce violence.

The 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence is an international campaign that begins every year on November 25, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, and concludes on December 10, Human Rights Day. The 16 Days of Activism has taken place every year since 1991 and this year's theme is "UNITE! Activism to End Violence Against Women and Girls!"

The inspiring movement of Iranian women and girls against patriarchal oppression has highlighted the challenges that still exist. However, even in Canada, violence against women, girls and LGBTQ2S+ people is far too common. Research from Statistics Canada has indicated that one-third of Canadian children under 15 have experienced some form of physical or sexual abuse. The impact of this childhood trauma has far-reaching effects, with survivors of abuse being more likely to have long-term physical and mental health needs and are more likely to have alcohol or drug use disorders.

Last spring, we heard directly from students who organized rallies and called for stronger curriculum on consent. It is imperative that we listen to the experiences of students and act.

The education system has an important role to play in helping to prevent these patterns of harm and abuse. The Ministry of Education and Child Care is taking action to help teachers build a culture of consent in their classrooms and schools.

- Working with a team of classroom teachers and subject matter experts, the Ministry has significantly expanded the content in the Supporting Student Health guides related to consent and gender-based violence. These guides provide background information and teaching suggestions to help teachers feel more confident and comfortable addressing these situations with their students.

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- This same team has also developed a large number of curriculum enhancements for the Physical and Health Education (PHE) curriculum to provide teachers with additional guidance on how to integrate these topics into their classrooms.
- The *erase* website has expanded to include dedicated resources on consent and gender-based violence to prevent and respond to different forms of gender-based abuse.

I encourage you to share information about these resources with all administrators and educators in your district and ask them to take action in their schools and classrooms to build a culture of consent, awareness, and education to prevent incidents of gender-based violence.

While these actions represent an important step forward for our education system, there is still more work to do. In particular, the work of youth activists and abuse survivors have highlighted the importance of comprehensive consent education from Kindergarten through graduation in Grade 12. While the mandatory PHE curriculum provides opportunities from Kindergarten to Grade 10, there is currently a gap in Grades 11-12 where topics related to consent are not part of the required curriculum for all students.

To ensure the safety of our students, I am calling on every superintendent and Board in British Columbia to find local solutions to ensure that all students – including those in Grades 11 and 12 – receive consent education during the school year. School districts may wish to take a variety of approaches.

Some suggestions include:

- Bringing in an expert from an organization who provides sexual health education, such as Options for Sexual Health (<https://www.optionsforsexualhealth.org/>)
- Connect with experts from local health authorities, such as public nurses to deliver presentations or students.
- Work with school staff to integrate these topics into other Grade 11 and 12 subject areas.

While there are a variety of potential methods, it is crucial that all schools take action no later than the 2023/24 school year to protect the safety and human rights of all students in their district.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue and for taking action in your district to promote consent education and end gender-based violence in our schools.

Sincerely,



Jennifer Whiteside
Minister