

## Minister Eggen Meets with Parents -Through PCE

On May 25, 2016 [Parents for Choice in Education](#) Executive Director Donna Trimble, Theresa Ng of [Informed Albertans](#) and Sara Baril of [PRO Children Alberta](#) and [Expose CSE Alberta](#) met with Education Minister, David Eggen.

We would not have received this 60-minute meeting if not for the courage, perseverance and love of parents, grandparents and concerned citizens from across Alberta - the tens of thousands of you who wrote letters and made phone calls to your MLAs, the 23,000+ people who have signed the petition so far and the 4500+ of you who showed up in-person from across the province to attend the May 14th rallies. Your compassion, your love, your tenacity, and your courage can be seen in the pictures from May 14, 2016 at the [Calgary McDougall Centre](#) and the [Edmonton Legislature](#). We sincerely thank you all for continuing to remind the Alberta Government that in order to protect ALL Alberta children, parental rights must be upheld.

Many of you have communicated with Donna, Sara and Theresa over the past months (and years) and we used this 60 minute opportunity to clearly represent your concerns. We are honored by the faith you put in us!

We are hopeful Minister Eggen will meet us again in the coming weeks - a promise given at the end of the meeting when Minister Eggen responded to our request for a follow up meeting with, "Sure, definitely." Donna will be following up with Jeremy Nolais, the Chief of Staff for Minister Eggen, to garner this meeting, and we hope for a thorough response to the information we provided, including a continued dialogue on the specific questions we provided for him on the [Meeting Agenda](#).

We appreciated that Minister Eggen's overall tone was positive, collaborative and receptive to our concerns. He stated rights must be "balanced", that hearing our concerns was "helpful", he was left with a lot to "think about", and he wanted "to provide clarity and interaction". He acknowledged that he sees the "hot spots", and "need[s] to be conscious of people's rights... work[ing] in harmony."

First, Donna spoke to the importance of parental involvement in the care and counselling of at risk youth, especially those who identify as being associated with the LGBTQ population. We used studies procured by those in support of transgenderism and the LGBTQ as these studies repeatedly prove that the most important ally to these children are their own parents. Quoting from Trans Pulse, [Impact of Strong Parental Support for Trans Youth](#), we read the following: "Knowing one has social and family supports is very important in the development of one's overall sense of health and well-being. In Trans PULSE, parental support of youth's gender identity and expression was directly associated with how trans youth rated their health and general well-being."

On suicide risk: “Consideration of suicide was common, and was reported by 35% of youth whose parents were strongly supportive and 60 % of those whose parents were not strongly supportive. Particularly alarming is that among this latter 60%, nearly all (57%) had actually attempted suicide in the past year. In contrast, only 4% of those with strongly supportive parents attempted suicide. While 4% is still far too high, the impact of strong parental support can be clearly seen in the 93% reduction in reported suicide attempts for youth who indicated their parents were strongly supportive of their gender identity and expression.”

Finally, regarding how the government should be approaching these issues in schools we read that “...ultimately our data indicate that it is parents and caregivers themselves who provide the foundation for their children’s health and well-being with their support. Therefore, policy-makers and Service Providers need to ensure effective services are available directly for parents and caregivers of trans youth.”

Donna stated that parents must be notified and informed of the needs of their children in school, and if circumvented - in cases of genuine danger - there must be a formula by which other outside resources (e.g. Social Services) are engaged to provide a team of support for the child, with proper documentation. Donna said this must be written into Bill 10 and School Board Policies and quoted from Theresa Ng, “We must advocate for policies that encourage at-risk, vulnerable youth to strengthen child-family bonds, as this is a key protective factor identified by the research to increase their resilience in the face of challenges and adversity.”

In response to Minister Eggen’s mention that “only in extreme circumstances” would parents not be informed, Theresa Ng quoted directly from Calgary Board of Education’s [Conditions to Thrive](#) document (page 5-39), which clearly instructs that “should a student disclose that they are a sexual or gender minority to a CBE staff member, the information should be held in confidence. Unless a student provides permission to share this information, the staff member should not disclose this information to anyone else, including other staff members and parents/guardians.” Theresa pointed out that the messaging was very different from Minister Eggen’s assurances and asked how parents were supposed to reconcile these two very different messages - what Minister Eggen is saying with what the policies are saying - especially since what is written trumps what is said.

Theresa Ng, who worked as an elementary teacher for many years, then spoke to the fact that Bill 10 and the sexual orientation and gender identity policies put forth by many school boards, based on the Education Guidelines, dis-empower teachers and other school staff from using their professional judgement to most effectively support children because policies such as the one cited by the Calgary Board of Education (CBE) do not allow teachers to access supports, such as parents and the expertise of other staff and professionals, unless the child provides permission. She stated that factors of age, maturity and developmental appropriateness have not been considered in the application of these policies, as well as in the presentation of information in schools related to concepts of gender fluidity (quoted definition on [page 5-35](#) of CBE’s document) and the [Genderbread Person](#). She also said that encouraging private

conversations of a sexual and sensitive nature between a school staff member and a child from 5 to 18 years of age raises red flags for educators and parents alike. Teachers are already overburdened just trying to educate a wide range of students in a classroom and these expectations put them under additional strain.

Sara Baril spoke next, and she spoke for children and specifically about Comprehensive Sexuality Education. She stated that parents are described as 'partners' in the Education Act, and that 'partners', in the care of children, do not keep secrets. She spoke about the need to consider the diverse individual needs of children in relation to club attendance, counselling, and Sexual Education. She also explained that families in Alberta hold a wide range of values on gender and human sexuality, from secular to deeply religious, emphasizing that freedom of religion, belief and association must be respected and that these changes must balance freedoms.

As Alberta's curriculum for Sexual Education and Career and Life Management (CALM) will soon be undergoing revisions, Sara expressed that it is essential parents are engaged in the process, with a seat at the table of discussion. She emphasized that children are not miniature adults and information must be age appropriate. Sara explained the concept of an 'opt-in' for parents, where no child should ever be engaged in study or counselling of a sexual nature (including matters regarding gender identity and expression) without explicit permission of the parents. Furthermore, that it is essential any curriculum of a sexual nature be provided to parents. This being key as all children are different, and with a class of 20-30 students a teacher may not know and/or be able to address all the needs and sensitivities of every child considering factors such as: maturity, temperament (shyness), past or present sexual abuse (post traumatic responses in abused children), developmental or social disabilities (1 in 10 students have developmental challenges), the cultural beliefs of families that may be in opposition to the activities of clubs, counselling and Sexual Education, etc. Sara also mentioned that encouraging private discussions on sexuality between a troubled student and school staff is not only contradictory to the Alberta Teachers Association's advice in a handbook [Teachers' Rights, Responsibilities and Legal Liabilities](#) (page 34), but fosters increased risk of sexual abuse - which, while rare, can and has happened. Sara provided a [letter](#) outlining these concerns to Minister Eggen for his future reference.

Donna ended the meeting by reminding Minister Eggen that Parents for Choice in Education does not hold a position on Gay Straight Alliances (GSAs) in and of themselves. That being said, GSA's and many activities that would take place in these "student-driven" clubs are in contradiction to many school cultures and to families who send their children to non-faith based schools like public schools. Donna reminded Minister Eggen that prior to Bill 10, there were already support groups in many schools - including the Catholic Separate School Board - that supported youth at risk very well while being cohesive to sensitivities of families and school culture. Bill 10 mandated clubs and how they could be named, and removed the rights of parents and administrators to ensure that any activities in these clubs would be cohesive to the school setting or beliefs of parents. She explained this is in contradiction to Article 26 of the

Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Education Act, where parents are the primary directors of their children's education. She also explained how stripping the right of school administrators and parents to work with students in the development of clubs, as was the case prior to Bill 10, is liable to create more distress for children as this will likely create battles between children and parents or students and school staff, parents and schools, or schools and the government. Consequently, this will leave already at-risk children at the centre of a battle ground, and suffering the ramifications of such conflict. Donna asked that amendments be made to ensure that parents and schools can work with children to ensure that clubs are cohesive to the needs of children, while respecting the culture of their families and schools. Supporting children need not create contradiction between a child's struggles and their faith traditions.

Throughout the meeting Minister Eggen often replied to the information with comments such as "that is interesting", "that is very helpful", "I can understand", "will look into that".

This meeting was a positive start to what Parents for Choice in Education hopes will be an ongoing dialogue with Minister Eggen and the Government of Alberta on how to create and provide a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment for all students in Alberta schools. This will be accomplished through supporting active parental involvement and participation.

Once again, we want to thank each of you for making this meeting possible with your involvement in confronting Bill 10, school board policies based on the Education Guidelines, and the upcoming revision of Sexual Education and CALM Curriculum in Alberta. Thank you also to Jackie who took notes during the meeting!

We are proud to be working with each one of you, protecting the children of Alberta, by defending parent rights. We will not relent.

Donna Trimble, Sara Baril, and Theresa Ng