

November 9th, 2012

To the Honourable Members of the Ontario Legislature;

We are writing to ask you to help ensure that the fundamentals of our democratic institutions and traditions be included in a revised Civics Curriculum soon to be released by the Ministry of Education.

Since 2010 there has been an effort to inform the Ministry of Education about deficiencies in the current CHV2O (Civics) curriculum as it headed toward its 2012 review (part of the ministry's 7-year review cycle). **Currently the Ontario Civics' curriculum does not mandate that students learn about the fundamentals of our Canadian democracy** (no mention is made of our constitutional monarchy, written and unwritten constitution, responsible government, or confidence convention). A definition for Parliament is given in the glossary of the curriculum document, but it is incorrect (and apparently taken from the textbook *Canadian By Conviction*, 2000).

Letters expressing concern have been sent to the past two Ministers of Education, as well as the Curriculum and Assessment Branch over the past two years by such individuals as Ian Holloway (then two-term Dean of Law at the University of Western Ontario), Professor Thomas Symons (Founding President and Vanier Professor Emeritus of Trent University as well as former Chairman of the National Commission on Canadian Studies), Dr. David E. Smith (author of *The Invisible Crown: The First Principle of Canadian Government; The People's House of Commons; The Canadian Senate in Bicameral Perspective*), as well as the Churchill Society for the Advancement of Parliamentary Democracy. These letters have included concrete suggestions to correct the problems in our curriculum that we would again like to put forward to the Minister of Education, Karen Gill (Director of the Curriculum and Assessment Branch) or a Parliamentary Committee (they can be viewed at www.canadiancrown.com – click on link at the top of the page).

In a response by Minister Laurel Broten (letter dated March 2nd, 2012), recently echoed by the Premier's Office, it was stated that the current curriculum does address the study of our government with the single overall expectation:

"Students are expected to describe the main structures and functions of municipal, provincial, and federal government in Canada."

What this means is up to the individual classroom teacher to interpret – many of whom are mystified by the system themselves. Textbook companies in the private sector take their cues from the provincial curricula, and since Ontario has the largest audience of students it carries the greatest amount of influence. With a curriculum that does not provide specific guidance on what the foundations of Canada's democracy are, the textbooks (most of which are on the provinces' "Trillium List") being used by students are filled with egregious errors:

- Most textbooks make no mention of responsible government, written and unwritten constitution, Statute of Westminster (1931);
- *Civics: Participating in a Democratic Society* (2000) states "The governor general holds office for five years. This term can be renewed once" and that the governor general's role is "purely ceremonial." Also the lieutenant governor is appointed by the governor general "on the advice of the provincial premier."
- Definition of Parliament given in *Canadian By Conviction* (2000) and reprinted in the glossary of the Civics' Curriculum document:

“an elected assembly responsible for passing legislation and granting the right to levy taxes (federal legislature in Canada consists of the sovereign’s representative, the Senate, and the House of Commons.”

Truly, what is not mentioned in Canadian textbooks is almost as misleading as what is. Since political science is not a specific teachable for Ontario educators, often times the Civics course is given to instructors with little or no background knowledge. With little experience, teachers will often rely on flawed textbooks – promoting a vicious cycle of ignorance.

If we do not include the fundamental aspects of our democracy in the new Civics curriculum about to be announced, the students of this province will continue to be awarded their ½ credit without having to demonstrate an understanding of our Parliamentary Democracy.

With only 49% of our province’s electorate bothering to vote in the last provincial election, your voice is needed to restore the fundamentals of our democratic institutions and traditions to a revised Civics Curriculum.

Sincerely,

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Kirk Howard
President and CEO, Dundurn Group
Past President, Organization of the Book Publishers of Ontario
Past President, Association of Canadian Publishers

Mark D. Jarvis
Doctoral candidate at the University of Victoria
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