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The Honourable Laurel Broten, Minister of Education

701 Evans Avenue, Suite 100
Etobicoke, ON M9C 1A3

Dear Ms. Broten,

Thank you for your letter dated March 2nd, 2012, in which you acknowledged receipt of my suggestions to the Ontario CHV20 curriculum, pointing out some of the expectations that already exist.

You stated in your letter that the curriculum documents for *Social Studies, Grades 1 to 6, History and Geography, Grades 7 and 8;* and *Canadian and World Studies* from Grades 9 to 12 are currently under review, and that there have been opportunities at every level (including Board) to provide input into this process. I can assure you that I have been offering feedback throughout the review process.

In order for the Ontario curriculum to remain “current, relevant and grade appropriate” we need to use this opportunity to ensure that our students are being properly educated.

Yes, the Grade 5 curriculum states that students are “. . . expected to identify current and historical political figures and their significance as well as explain the significance of civic buildings and symbols.” For a Grade Five student this is a good way to be eased into the complex world of Canadian democracy, but the problem is that this is all they will hear about it for five years.

There are a lot of points about being a global citizen, however there are only a few lines emphasizing the need to understand the actual system of government enjoyed by Canadians. As you point out, the key line reads:

“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.

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Canada is a constitutional monarchy with a written and unwritten constitution. Queen Elizabeth II is Queen of Canada and the embodiment of the State; the source of authority in our democracy. Thanks to responsible government (that unwritten convention that was first practiced in 1848 Nova Scotia) the Sovereign (represented by the Governor General federally or the Lieutenant Governor provincially) must follow the advice of an elected executive (headed by a prime minister or premier).

The very fundamentals of Canadian democracy – constitutional monarchy, written and unwritten constitution, responsible government and confidence of the legislature – are integral to the understanding of its structures and functions. They need to be explicitly laid out.

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 is, the textbooks (including those on the provinces’ “Trillium List”) being used by students are filled with egregious errors (No mention of our complex constitution, repeated references to the Queen as simply the “British Monarch,” and incomplete or inaccurate definitions). 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.

As part of the Diamond Jubilee of Her Majesty as Queen of Canada, it would be a fitting tribute to the Queen to fix the Ontario Civics’ curriculum. Such a fix would be very simple, and I look forward to hearing your comments concerning the suggestions made in my earlier letter.

I have included copy of the previous letter I sent to you in January.

Sincerely,

Nathan Tidridge OCT

cc: Karen Gill (Manager, Implementation and Review Committee), Beth Brown (Senior Policy Coordinator, Implementation and Review Committee), Stephen Kelly (Coordinator, Curriculum Review, Implementation and Review Committee).