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## Opposition to Alberta education policy not about bathrooms

By THERESA NG

On May 14th at the legislature, I had the honour of being MC for the Parents for Choice in Education (PCE) peaceful rally.

It was a tremendous success, with over 4300 in attendance – 2300 in Edmonton and over 2000 in Calgary.

The purpose of our rally was motivated by concerns regarding one critical question: who has authority over children and their education in Alberta?

The government? Or parents?

First, we know every child's success is strengthened when parental involvement is supported. However, through Bill 10 and Alberta Education's Guidelines for Best Practices, the government is undermining the important role and legal right of parents as a "primary guide and decision maker" in their child's education (Education Act, sec 32).

According to the government's "best practices", parents would not be notified of their child's sexual orientation and gender identity struggles, unless the child provides explicit permission to do so. Furthermore, a child can receive "support" for their struggles through a GSA (gay-straight alliance), also without any parental knowledge or involvement.

Bill 10 and the Guidelines include no consideration for developmental age-appropriateness, maturity or age of the student, meaning they apply

equally whether your child is aged five, 10 or 15.

Do Albertan parents truly believe it is "best practice" to not be informed of their child's struggles at school? Should information be purposely withheld from parents regarding activities that children participate in during school hours?

How are parents best able to act as the "primary guide and decision maker" in their child's education when they do not have access to critical information about their child?

Second, we must understand that all of us have value systems, especially regarding the deeply personal and sensitive topics of sexuality and identity. To ensure all people in our pluralistic, multicultural province live peacefully and democratically alongside one another, we must demonstrate respect to those of many different value systems.

Frankly, it is irrelevant to this discussion which values you personally happen to agree with. The fundamental question is not whether any one person believes a set of values to be right or wrong, but rather whether the government should be permitted to allow one value system to trump all others in the teaching of K-12 students within our public, independent, charter, and Catholic schools across the province.

Should it be the government's role to dictate for all people which value systems are "approved" and which ones are not, especially when K-12 children are considered a captive,

impressionable audience?

These are the critical questions underlying widespread concerns being voiced by tens of thousands of people across the province in regard to Bill 10 and the Guidelines. And they are questions which deserve our thoughtful, respectful, reasonable consideration.

Many believe that the freedom to raise our families as we see fit is in peril when schools intentionally withhold information about children from the parents and politicians manipulate our education system to impose a specific ideology on everyone, without consideration and respect for the diversity of value systems that exist in our province.

According to the more than 4,300 people who attended the PCE rallies, it is an intrusion of the government into the sphere of the family to suggest that government be permitted this type of authority in the lives of our children and families.

We encourage all Albertans to move beyond the widespread mischaracterizations of this issue so they can properly inform themselves and then communicate concerns to their elected officials.

Our families, our values, and our freedoms are too valuable to sacrifice due to misrepresentation, unawareness or political correctness.

Snap out of it, Alberta. It is not about bathrooms.

*Theresa Ng is a parent, former teacher and the author of Informed Albertans.*