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# Alberta Education Minister David Eggen's direct appeal to children on Gay-Straight Alliances troubling

Citizens across Alberta, regardless of whether they support or oppose anti-bullying policies and clubs for students that identify as LGBTQ, should be deeply concerned about Education Minister David Eggen's Facebook letter directed to Alberta children.

Minister Eggen's letter appears to lead children to assume that all school board policies have complied with certain aspects of the Education Guidelines (which he has stated publicly are not mandatory). In fact, there are schools that have not integrated these guidelines into their school board policies.

He goes further, and appears to coach students on how to bypass parents and schools with their concerns if these 'rights' are not met, providing an email for students to directly contact his government staff "who can help ensure your rights are being respected."

Is this 'open letter' a veiled attempt to bully and coerce non-compliant schools into implementing guidelines which Minister Eggen has stated publicly are an optional resource, and not legally binding?

Every citizen of Alberta should speak out against the use of vulnerable children, to strong arm schools, if that was the intention. If this was not the intention, then the citizens of Alberta must demand clarification.

Genuinely endangered children are protected under law through outreach to outside interventions such as social services and the courts. There is no valid reason for encouraging children to communicate directly

with government in an apparent invitation to inform on their schools.

Support for the anti-bullying legislation passed by the Alberta government and the optional guidelines for best practices is far from unanimous. Many parents feel both the legislative changes and the guidelines will damage the parent-child bond and numerous school boards believe these changes in policy strip school autonomy. Whether everyone agrees on these points is not the issue.

The issue is that the Minister of Education appears to be modeling the assumption that in order to show care and compassion for LGBTQ youth, citizens, parents and schools must agree with the policies being pushed by government on schools. This is an incorrect and dangerous correlation, and this increases the distress of vulnerable youth caught in the middle of this false assumption.

Parents, teachers, schools and communities can care compassionately for at-risk youth without agreeing that the policies being enforced by government are beneficial.

If love and care is confused with agreement, thought will ultimately be controlled and agreement enforced.

To forget the distinct difference between compassion and agreement can lead to only one thing: totalitarianism.

Correlating compassion and care with acceptance of particular policies will always lead to the shutting down of debate, which is the keystone of every democratic nation.

Minister Eggen must work with all Alberta citizens, regardless of their agreement with particular government strategies, to support those most vulnerable at the local level, with the full involvement of parents, and the support of their local schools and communities.

Some 25,318 Albertans have signed the Parents for Choice in Education petition in support of parental rights in education and more than 4,000 attended the May, 2016 rallies to Protect Alberta Children, by upholding parental rights.

These are citizens of Alberta that care deeply for all at-risk youth, including those from the LGBTQ community, who disagree with the idea that the government guidelines and recent legislative changes are the best way to support these vulnerable children.

These are good citizens across this province who have been shut out of this debate and labelled intolerant for having a different opinion of 'best practices.'

It is time to bring open and honest debate back to our representative government. We must ensure all Albertan citizens are invited to work together to ensure vulnerable youth are cared for at the local level by their parents, teachers, schools and communities.

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