

Victorian Schools Face Debate Over Gender Diversity Education

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A letter from the Australian Christian Lobby (ACL), signed by 1,850 Victorians, has sparked controversy over Victoria's school curriculum, particularly the Respectful Relationships program, which includes teaching primary students about gender diversity. The ACL argues that aspects of the program promote gender ideology as fact, potentially contradicting biological sex and confusing children.

The letter expresses concerns that curriculum content undermines parental rights to guide their children's beliefs. It cites links between school programs and access to gender clinics, referencing a UK review conducted by Dr. Hilary Cass, which highlighted what the ACL described as weaknesses in the foundations of gender medicine.

Among the ACL's proposals is the removal of policies such as the "mature minor" provisions and LGBTIQ+ Student Support policies, which allow certain students to access guidance or medical services without parental consent. The lobby warned of potential legal liabilities for schools if decisions are made without parents' approval.

The group also called for the elimination of sex education content, they say encourages premature sexual exploration. Instead, the ACL advocates for increased parental involvement, emphasizing teaching ethics, personal boundaries, and decision-making guidance aligned with family values.

Education experts have noted that the Respectful Relationships program aims to provide students with knowledge about diversity, inclusion, and respectful social interactions. Victoria's Department of Education has defended the curriculum, stating that it is designed to equip children with skills to understand personal identity, empathy, and healthy relationships. Officials maintain that parental engagement is encouraged and supported through information sessions and resources.

The debate has drawn attention from politicians, educators, and advocacy groups. Some have expressed support for the ACL's concerns, emphasizing parental rights and age-appropriate learning, while others argue that removing such curriculum elements could limit students' understanding of diversity and inclusive social behavior.

Dr. Helen Wright, a child development specialist, said, "It is important that children are taught about respect and social diversity in developmentally appropriate ways. Balancing parental involvement with educational objectives is a key consideration for schools."

The discussion has also highlighted broader questions about the role of schools in teaching sensitive topics and the extent to which parents should influence curricular decisions. Legal experts have indicated that schools must navigate both education regulations and the rights of parents, making transparency and communication essential.

Victoria's Department of Education has indicated it will review submissions from community stakeholders and advocacy groups as part of an ongoing consultation process. The aim is to ensure that the curriculum meets educational standards while addressing concerns raised by parents and community members.

The ACL's letter underscores the continuing debate in Victoria over the intersection of education, parental rights, and social inclusion. Schools, parents, and policymakers are expected to engage in discussions in the coming months to determine how curriculum content on gender diversity and sexual health is delivered across the state.

As the issue develops, educators and community leaders stress the importance of constructive dialogue to balance children's learning needs with family values and cultural