



ONTARIO PUBLIC  
SCHOOL BOARDS'  
ASSOCIATION

Leading Education's Advocates

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March 6, 2009

The Hon. Roy McMurtry, and  
Dr. Alvin Curling  
C/o Roots of Youth Violence Secretariat  
2nd Floor, 880 Bay Street  
Toronto, Ontario M7A 2B6

Dear Sirs:

Re: The Review of the Roots of Youth Violence  
Chapter 10: Social Learning, the Media and Violence

On February 15, 2008, we presented to the Roots of Youth Violence Secretariat on behalf of the Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) Violence in the Media Coalition (the "Coalition"). The Coalition comprises a diverse group of educators, school board trustees, victims' advocates, parent groups and police. This group was brought together in October 2005 by OPSBA to work towards reducing the exposure of children and youth to violent media. Our approach involves education, awareness raising and advocacy for relevant legislative change. We believe this work is vital in light of a consensus among the major medical and mental health organizations in North America that exposure to violent media can have harmful effects. A list of these organizations is attached.

This widespread consensus was reflected in a joint statement released in July 2000 by the American Academy of Pediatrics, American Psychological Association, American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, American Medical Association, American Academy of Family Physicians and the American Psychiatric Association. Their *Joint Statement on the Impact of Entertainment Violence on Children* presented to a U.S. Congressional Public Health Summit stated:

*"At this time, well over 1,000 studies -- including reports from the Surgeon General's office, the National Institute of Mental Health, and numerous studies conducted by leading figures within our medical and public health organizations -- our own members -- point overwhelmingly to a causal connection between media violence and aggressive*

*behaviour in some children. The conclusion of the public health community, based on over 30 years of research, is that viewing entertainment violence can lead to increases in aggressive attitudes, values and behavior, particularly in children. Its effects are measurable and long-lasting.”*

The Canadian Paediatric Society, in its 2003 position statement, *Impact of Media Use on Children and Youth*, stated, "The influence of the media on the psychosocial development of children is profound", "data showing the negative effects of exposure to violence, inappropriate sexuality and offensive language are convincing", and the Society advises physicians "who see a child with a history of aggressive behaviour [to] inquire about the child's exposure to violence portrayed on television". More recently the American Psychological Association expressed grave concerns about media violence and the research demonstrating the potential harm of violent video games (see <http://www.apa.org/releases/videoviolence05.html>).

In light of this agreement among experts, we were greatly concerned to read the following conclusion published in *The Review of the Roots of Youth Violence*:

*“Some theories suggest that media violence leads to social learning of violent behaviour, while others suggest that entertainment is typically used to manage emotions and that those who are already aggressive actively seek out violent media content. **The findings to date do not provide clear and consistent evidence that media violence causes aggressive and violent behaviour.**”*  
(Emphasis added)

Your report's conclusion in this regard is not supported by the research or the facts. Indeed, in a report released in December 2008 by Ontario's Safe Schools Action Team, the authors acknowledged the influence of the media in helping to shape anti-social attitudes and behaviour:

*“It is widely acknowledged that content showing violence, including gender-based violence, is a staple of much media programming. Such content frequently models negative relationships and perpetuates stereotypes. Research indicates that prolonged exposure to such material can encourage imitation, stimulate violent or aggressive behaviour, cause emotional desensitization towards victims, and reduce the inclination to intervene to help victims or seek help on their behalf. 1[1]”*

One of their recommendations includes media awareness and education to help counter these harmful effects.

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1[1] *Shaping a Culture of Respect in our Schools: Promoting Safe and Healthy Relationships*, Safe Schools Action Team Report on Gender-based Violence, Homophobia, Sexual Harassment, and Inappropriate Sexual Behaviour in Schools, Ontario Ministry of Education, December 11, 2008

Since both reports on youth violence will be read by policy makers, politicians, educators and others with influence over the media consumed by children and youth, it's unfortunate and troubling that they put forward such conflicting information on the issue. We would request that you give sober second thought to this chapter of your document which, in our view, undermines all the excellent work you have done and the otherwise positive impact of your report.

Sincerely,



Dr. Peter Jaffe



Gail Anderson

The following North American medical and mental health organizations have acknowledged the harmful influence of violent media and endorsed the research findings:

- American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry
- American Academy of Family Physicians
- American Academy of Mental Health
- American Academy of Pediatrics
- American College of Physicians
- American Society of Internal Medicine
- American Medical Association
- American Medical Association Alliance
- American Nurses Association
- American Psychiatric Association
- American Psychological Association
- American Public Health Association
- Canadian Paediatric Society
- National Institute of Mental Health (U.S.)
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
- U.S. Surgeon General