

What is the Corren Agreement?

It is a private agreement between two homosexual activists, Peter and Murray Corren, and the BC Ministry of Education.

How did it come about?

The Correns made a human rights complaint in 1999 to try to force pro-homosexual curriculum into the public school system. On 28 April, 2006, the Ministry of Education and the Correns signed a private agreement, in secret, to settle the case on terms acceptable to the Correns.¹

It was signed in secret?

Yes. And the government agreed to keep it secret for over a month after it was signed. Moreover, it guarantees the continuing secrecy of written and verbal communications between Correns and the government.

Can it be revoked or changed?

If the government tried to revoke it, the Correns can ask the Supreme Court to enforce it. It can be revised with the consent of the government and the Correns. Because of the guarantee of continuing secrecy, this can be done without public knowledge.

What are the terms of the Agreement?

- Kindergarten to Grade 12 curriculum will be revised to ensure “respect for diversity with respect to sexual orientation.”
- A Grade 12 Social Justice elective will be developed.
- Parents will not be allowed to withdraw their children from classes that they find morally objectionable or offensive or otherwise unsuitable for the children.
- Correns have a privileged position as consultants and overseers of curriculum development and public policy.

What will the curriculum revisions mean?

That is difficult to say, for two reasons. First: the revisions haven't yet been published. Second: “sexual orientation” is undefined.

Isn't 'sexual orientation' just another word for homosexual or heterosexual?

No. In activist literature, the usual acronyms used to describe 'alternative orientation' are variations on “GLBT” - gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered.² The Correns say they want “non-heterosexual realities” into the curriculum from Kindergarten to Grade 12.³ The Ministry of Education wants “representation of individuals and groups *across the full range of gender identity and sexual orientation*”⁴ - whatever that means.

Even so, the Social Justice course will be optional.

That's true. And that's why the Correns don't think it's important. “We wouldn't have worked for 10 years to sell out for something as minor as just a simple elective course,” Murray Corren told the Vancouver Sun.⁵

If the Social Justice course isn't important, what is?

Murray Corren told the Sun he considered other curriculum changes and “tougher limits on parental rights to remove their children from classes teaching 'sensitive content'” far more important than the Social Justice elective.⁶

Why get tough on parents?

The Correns were frustrated because they were unable to force “queer-positive” curriculum on all Kindergarten to Grade 12 students. They found that parents frequently withdrew their children from classes when teachers tried to talk about homosexuality and teach them that it is morally acceptable. They wanted that stopped.⁷

And the Ministry of Education agreed?

Yes. The Ministry agreed to tell school districts that they are not allowed to permit opting out of classes or alternative delivery of curriculum curriculum outside health and personal planning.

But the Minister of Education says the Corren Agreement hasn't changed anything.

That is misleading. BC school districts have traditionally worked out satisfactory arrangements with parents who have serious objections to parts of the curriculum. For example, parents might withdraw their children from objectionable lessons or classes

and meet learning outcomes at home. This is called “alternative delivery of curriculum.”

The Ministry of Education had a formal policy for alternative delivery only in health and personal planning, but it never attempted to interfere with school districts accommodating parental concerns in other parts of the curriculum. The Minister of Education has promised the Correns that her Ministry will now do just that.

Can the Ministry of Education force the Corren Agreement on public school districts?

Only up to a point. The government has the authority to change the curriculum, and the school districts are obliged to implement the revisions. That's as far as the Ministry can go.

What about getting tough on parents who want to opt out?

The Correns and the Ministry would like everyone to think that they can order school districts to impose morally controversial lessons on children over the objections of their parents. It's up to parents and school trustees to reject this claim.

What can parents do?

Parents are entitled to ensure that the moral education of the children conforms to their own convictions. This authority is recognized by international agreements and consistent with the exercise of fundamental freedoms guaranteed by the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.⁸

Parents should elect trustees willing to defend these freedoms, and they should demand that school districts and teachers accommodate them.

What can trustees and school district officials do?

School districts are legally obliged to accommodate the exercise of freedom of conscience and religion to the point of undue hardship. The Ministry of Education cannot relieve them of this duty, and trustees should refuse to implement Ministry directives or guidelines that conflict with it. The traditional practice of accommodating parental concerns throughout the curriculum has served families in this province well, and it should continue. There is no need to fix what isn't broken.

Notes

1. *Settlement Agreement between Murray Corren and Peter Corren (Complainants) and Her Majesty the Queen in Right of the Province of British Columbia, as Represented by the Ministry of Education (Respondent)*, 28 April, 2006.

(<http://www.ccrl.ca/Documents/2006-04-28CorrenAgreement.pdf>)

2. For example, "Peer counselling programs need to include training in glbt issues and support strategies." *Creating a Safe School- A Model For Ending Homophobia In Your School* (Handout at Gay and Lesbian Educators of BC workshop, 10 December, 1996, Powell River, B.C.)

3. Steffenhagen, Janet, "Schools Go Queer: Gay guarantee for provincial curriculum. Contract assures same-sex couple will have unprecedented influence over B.C. curriculum." *Vancouver Sun*, 16 June, 2006

(<http://www.canada.com/components/print.aspx?id=223d5fea-2e50-4b1d-9678-f37850ca50cb&k=69470?id=6>) Accessed 2006-12-21

4. BC Ministry of Education, *Curriculum Development and Revision: Guidelines for Internal Ministry Review of Draft Curriculum* (Revised 22 November, 2006).

(http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/irp/irp_internal_review.pdf) Accessed 2007-01-26. Emphasis added.

5. Steffenhagen, Janet, *supra*.

6. Steffenhagen, Janet, *supra*.

7. Luymes, Glenda, "Hooky touted for anti-gay parents: Trustee claims Education Ministry policy on opting out takes away 'freedom'". *The Province*, 12 September 12, 2006

8. Murphy, Sean, *Parental Authority in Education: the International Context*.

(<http://www.ccrl.ca/index.php?id=4836>)

"...citizens do not surrender freedom of conscience and religion as a condition of attending a public school, nor do parents surrender their authority to the state, to a union, to a profession or to special interest activists when they entrust their children to a public school system." (*CCRL letter to BC school districts*)

For more information -

The Corren Agreement

More detailed information and news about the position of school district with respect to parental authority. <http://www.ccrl.ca/index.php?id=4835>

The Goose, the Gander and the Elephant

The response to Murray Corren's article in Teacher Newsmagazine that the BCTF refused to publish. <http://www.ccrl.ca/index.php?id=452>

Parental Authority in Education: the International Context

A review of nine international covenants and declarations. Those who want to compel children to attend lessons or classes that their parents find morally objectionable will not find support for their policies in these documents.

<http://www.ccrl.ca/index.php?id=4836>

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Looking into the Corren Agreement

Some secrets shouldn't be kept.



"There's no point in us making the curriculum more queer-positive if people can take their kids out."

Peter Corren