Benzie, Robert. “Saying he’s ‘pragmatic,’ Patrick Brown distancing himself from social conservative base”. *Toronto Star,* Sep 20, 2016

Patrick Brown appears to be turning his back on the social conservatives who helped him win the PC leadership.

Brown actively wooed anti-abortion activists, opponents of same-sex marriage, and critics of the updated sex-education curriculum during last year’s Progressive Conservative race.

That courtship ensured the [support](http://www.ourwindsor.ca/news-story/5837218-ontario-conservative-leader-brown-won-t-muzzle-sex-ed-critic) of leadership rival Monte McNaughton, the Lambton-Kent-Middlesex MPP who dropped out to back him.

But after‎ fallout over his flip-flop on a recent byelection promise to “scrap” the controversial health syllabus, the rookie Tory leader is distancing himself from what was a key part of his political coalition.

In a statement issued late Monday — seven hours after the Toronto Sun published[emails](https://www.scribd.com/document/324545631/Patrick-Brown-Written-Email-to-CLC-Saying-I-Will-Repeal-It#from_embed) he had sent social conservatives last year assuring ‎them he would “repeal” the sex-education curriculum — Brown insisted he is a “pragmatic” politician who has changed his thinking.

“Yes, my views on Ontario’s sexual education curriculum — and similar issues — have evolved,” the PC chief said.

“I opposed the changes to the curriculum when they were first announced. They were undeniably controversial and (Premier) Kathleen [Wynne](http://www.ourwindsor.ca/news-story/6867077-kathleen-wynne-s-liberals-gear-up-for-2018-campaign/) failed to explain it adequately to parents. Even (former premier) Dalton McGuinty backed away from implementing them,” his statement said.

“Time and the evidence of my own eyes tells (sic) me that I was mistaken. Concerns were exaggerated and have not borne out.”

Brown said he has “come to the conclusion that significant opposition to the curriculum was rooted in a refusal to accept LGBT elements into the curriculum.”

He also renounced his social conservative votes as a federal MP

“It’s not the first time I’ve been on the wrong side of an issue. In 2006, as a young MP I voted for a motion to reopen debate on the definition of marriage,” said Brown.

“Like many people, I’ve been shown countless times in my life by friends, family, and those I love how wrong I was to take that view. Today I strongly support marriage equality. It doesn’t matter who you are or who you love, and no government has any business saying it does.”

Staring down his critics within and outside the party, Brown said: “If the price to be paid is that my political opponents will say I’ve ‘flip-flopped,’ so be it. If you want a rigid ideologue as premier, vote for someone else.”

Josh Bronsveld, a social conservative on the board of directors of the federal Tory riding association in Dufferin-Caledon, expressed disappointment at the provincial leader.

“Many social conservatives supported your leadership bid, because you promised that you would repeal the disastrous sex ed curriculum. Unfortunately, your reversal on that issue has taken many social conservatives by surprise,” Bronsveld wrote in an open letter late Monday.

“It is hard to support a leader who cannot be honest with the electorate, and who fails to protect our children from being exposed to harmful sex education,” he continued.

“We have not even started the provincial election campaign, and you have managed to draw the ire of conservatives and liberals from around the province,” the activist wrote.

“Conservatives feel betrayed by your empty promises, and liberals do not trust your intentions. It is my belief, that you are incapable of leading the Progressive Conservative Party to victory in 2018,” he wrote.

“You have lost my vote, and the vote of my socially conservative friends and colleagues. I also believe that you should consider resigning as the leader of the PC Party.”

Last month, evangelist Charles McVety, a key Brown leadership backer, accused him of being “deceitful.”

“We have been used, deceived and betrayed,” McVety said Aug. 29.

That sense of betrayal is fuelled by the revelation that less than four weeks ago, Brown’s chief of staff, Nicolas Pappalardo, was in [secret talks](http://www.ourwindsor.ca/news-story/6862240-patrick-brown-s-chief-of-staff-had-secret-talks-with-social-conservatives-about-sex-education/) with social conservatives during the Scarborough-Rouge River before the Tories circulated 13,000 letters vowing to “scrap” the sex-education curriculum if elected in 2018.

The Aug. 24 missive in English and Chinese was signed by the leader, though he claimed he did not know about it – even though Pappalardo and party president Rick Dykstra and others were in the loop.

Sex education was a hot issue during the Sept. 1 byelection, [which was won](http://www.ourwindsor.ca/news-story/6836852-raymond-cho-an-unlikely-progressive-conservative-becomes-new-scarborough-rouge-river-mpp/) by Conservative Raymond Cho, and the Tories feared losing votes to Queenie Yu, an independent candidate opposed to the curriculum.

Brown has apologized, saying “a mistake was made,” and stressed a PC government would retain the modernized curriculum, which includes lessons on gender expression, same-sex relationships, and the dangers of sexting.

During last year’s PC leadership campaign, he had assured social conservatives in writing that he “will repeal it.”

That was the same theme Brown’s office used in negotiations last month with groups opposed to the curriculum.

“The Wynne Liberal government has ignored parents and introduced a controversial sexual health education curriculum against the will of parents,” he said in an Aug. 17 draft message to social conservatives revealed by the Star last Friday.

“I believe parents are the primary educators of their children. When it comes to sexual health education, parents should have a say on how much their children are taught, and at what age. Teachers should teach facts, not values. Parents should decide who teaches their children about values,” Brown said in the statement.

“If elected, a PC government would introduce a new curriculum after thoughtful and full consultation with parents. That consultation begins now, almost two years before the next election, and we invite parents to be a part of it.”

Confronted with the apparent contradiction, Brown said in an interview Thursday that he has “made my opinions on sex education abundantly clear.”