

August 30, 2011

Trustees
Toronto Catholic District School Board

by email

**RE: Open Letter to Trustees of the Toronto Catholic District School Board
Regarding Amendments to the Equity and Inclusive Education Policy**

Dear Trustees,

Tomorrow, you and your colleagues will participate in a critical vote on proposed amendments to Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Policy as applicable to the TCDSB.

In your deliberations, we encourage you to consider that such policies should not favour one group over another. In Ontario, the grounds of prohibited discrimination identified in the Human Rights Code include "race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status, family status and disability."

As much as consideration is to be given to the accommodation of students, there is also the need to recognize that the alternative education available from your religiously based and constitutionally guaranteed school board is just that, an alternative to the public system. As such, we also encourage you to make your decision in a way that recognizes the *raison d'être* for the existence of the TCDSB and not to allow the unique nature and character of a Catholic education to be infringed upon by the actions of the Government of Ontario.

A properly constructed "equity policy" will be robust and well-rounded enough to deal sensitively with the status of each student, not just a select group. And, that policy will not violate the nature of the educational institution that is implementing it. Should one choose to send one's children to a school that operates on principles other than those in the public system, one's expectation ought reasonably to be that the school be a welcoming place for students without the school being required to compromise the principles upon which the alternative school (whether privately or publicly funded) is established. In a diverse, free and democratic society Catholic schools are expected to be distinctively Catholic.

We encourage you to vote in a way that recognizes the rights of students who by their own or their parents' choice have sought out the distinctive nature of the Catholic education system. Your existence as "Catholic" benefits not only Catholic students and parents, but contributes to a genuine diversity in Canada by retaining an identity founded in the character and principles of your creed.

Sincerely,

Don Hutchinson
Vice-President, General Legal Counsel
Director, Centre for Faith and Public Life

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