

Dear Szabolcsy P.Y. 1.



**Office of the Director of Education
Office of the Chair of the Board**

September 12, 2012

Dear Parents and Guardians:

Bullying, in any form, is unacceptable.

Our primary concern and focus is always on the well-being of all our students. At the core of this philosophy is our Catholic belief to welcome every person with love, dignity and respect. That is why the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB) remains committed to teaching our students in accordance with our faith, and to foster a safe and welcoming school community for everyone.

Last May, during the Ontario government's consultations regarding the *Accepting Schools Act 2012* (Bill 13), the TCDSB along with other concerned citizens and groups, including the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario, expressed serious concerns regarding certain aspects of the Bill relating to GSAs (Gay-Straight Alliances). The primary reason is the fact that the *Respecting Difference* document created for Catholic schools has been at the forefront of the many proactive and effective efforts to combat all forms of bullying in our schools.

As you may be aware, the *Accepting Schools Act 2012* (Bill 13) was passed at Queen's Park on June 5, 2012 and came into force on September 1, 2012. Our school board will ensure that our principals comply with the new regulation which is now law in Ontario. The *Respecting Difference* approach will continue to be an invaluable resource to ensure that student-led groups reflect Catholic values and adhere to Ontario Education Ministry guidelines.

We recognize that some students may ask to identify a club as a "GSA" and therefore the name will be accepted by the principal if requested. Our concern has always been about the content more so than the term, therefore we want to assure you that this law does not remove the right of our principals to ensure the appropriateness of materials used in the school, and clubs will continue to strongly reflect and promote Catholic values and traditions.

The Board was a recognized leader in helping students fight bullying well before Bill 13, and we pledge to continue to be a leader in this area.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ann Andrachuk".

Ann Andrachuk
Chair of the Board

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bruce Rodrigues".

Bruce Rodrigues
Director of Education

Cc: Board of Trustees
CSAC Chairs
Director's Council
Education Council



Questions and Answers Regarding TCDSB's Implementation of Bill 13: Accepting Schools Act

1. **Has the curriculum in Catholic schools changed with Bill 13 coming into force on September 1, 2012?**

This legislation requires all school boards in Ontario to take preventative measures against bullying as well as other inappropriate student behaviour, and support students who want to promote understanding and respect for all. The curriculum in TCDSB Catholic schools remains unchanged, and is faithful to Church teachings.

2. **Will clubs that call themselves a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) be allowed in TCDSB schools?**
Bill 13 mandates that every school board support students who want to establish activities or organizations that promote the awareness and understanding of, and respect for, people of all sexual orientations and gender identities, including organizations with the name gay-straight alliance or another name.

Bill 13 is now the law in Ontario. Our concern has always been about the content more so than the term. So the name will be accepted by the principal, if requested by the students. However the law does not remove the right of our school principals to ensure the appropriateness of materials used in the school, and that they continue to be consistent with Catholic values. As with all school approved student groups there will be a staff advisor to guide, facilitate and supervise.

3. **How are students with same sex orientation supported in Catholic schools?**
We will continue to support any student who feels bullied or harassed because of their ethnicity, sexual orientation, physical abilities, or any other reason. In keeping with our commitment to ensuring that Catholic schools are safe, welcoming, nurturing places, supports for individual students will be provided by administrators, Chaplains, guidance counsellors and other trained staff.

If a student requests a group to address bullying related to sexual orientation, or is seeking pastoral guidance, Catholic school administrators will continue to provide appropriate supports including peer groups that support our Church teaching (Gospel values) with the understanding that a guiding framework is forthcoming.

Resources such as the Institute for Catholic Education's 2006 document pastoral guideline for students of same sex orientation and the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishop's recent letter on pastoral ministry to young people with same-sex attraction also offer guidance to educators. (http://www.cccb.ca/site/images/stories/pdf/ministry-ssa_en.pdf)

4. **Does the Toronto Catholic District School Board discriminate against students with same sex orientation?**

Bullying, in any form, is unacceptable. At the core of our Catholic beliefs is to welcome every person with love and respect. Our Board recognizes that social or cultural discrimination is incompatible with our mission and vision. The Respecting Difference information created for Catholic schools provides guidelines for ensuring that student-led groups to combat bullying reflect Catholic values and adhere to Ontario Education Ministry guidelines.

Our concern and focus is always on the well-being of the student. Catholics will continue to teach our students in a way that is in accordance with our faith, to ensure a safe and welcoming school community.