

Good evening. My name is Michelle Allen and although I am a teacher and a Catholic, I am here first and foremost as a mother.

Mothers and trustees have a lot in common. In both cases, our children are the guiding force in every decision we make. Our collective commitment is to treat our children with compassion, to have a positive impact on their success and to ensure that the environments we expose them to honour their individual identities.

At this point, I think it's important to clarify what identity is. It's the concept we develop about ourselves that evolves over the course of our life. It includes the aspects of ourselves that we have no control over such as where we grow up, the colour of our hair, eyes and skin and our gender and sexual orientation.

The acronym 2SLGBTQ+ is used in an attempt to name the many identities of the people in the gay community. The impact of homophobic bullying and discrimination faced by these students, at school is heartbreaking. Deep and lasting trauma is inflicted on them by systemic inequality, teachers and administrators who turn a blind eye, and classmates who have been taught that being gay, or even being perceived as gay, is shameful and wrong.

As stakeholders in the TCDSB, we know that reflective thinking can only be enhanced by asking pointed questions. I think the question on all of our minds tonight is "Why should we fly the Pride flag at all our TCDSB facilities in the month of June?"

We should fly the Pride flag because discrimination, in our school system, continues to harm our gay students and staff.

We should fly the Pride flag because it tells every member of the gay community (and everyone who is their ally) that they are loved unconditionally and accepted as they are.

We should fly the pride flag because it shows that the TCDSB truly believes in the worth and dignity of every person and is committed to providing safe, healthy environments for all students.

And finally, we should fly the Pride flag because it aims to celebrate inclusivity while encouraging awareness, kindness and acceptance for all.

Another thing mothers and trustees share is the fact that we sometimes make mistakes and when we do (as an example to our children) it is imperative that we acknowledge our wrong doing and make things right. For many years, in our Catholic communities we have ignored the abuse gay students endure and this treatment is inexcusable. Tonight we have the opportunity to make things right. We have the power to save lives, end systemic discrimination and begin to heal the wounds of the generations of gay students who have been harmed by the homophobic and prejudicial policies of the past.

This decision has the power to finally create a Catholic School System where my children, all our children, will feel loved and accepted exactly as they are.

It is only by working through our discomfort together that real and lasting change can happen. I'm asking you to use your voice and privilege to speak for the oppressed students in our schools (including the 2SLGBTQ+ population) by supporting the flying of the Pride flag.

Thank you