

May 4, 2021

From: Nicole Richard

To: Toronto Catholic District School Board Trustees and Director of Education

Re: Student Achievement meeting and Pride Month recommendation

Toronto is Canada's most populated city, also home to the largest publicly funded Catholic school board in North America, and has a motto that reflects the reality of the communities served: **"Diversity is Our Strength"**

For years, both the federal and municipal governments, as well as public and private organizations all across Canada, have acknowledged the 2SLGBTQ+ community with the rainbow flag during Pride Month. The rainbow flag is an internationally recognized symbol of love and acceptance that has been widely used for more than four decades.

Students and staff at the TCDSB have repeatedly requested Pride Month acknowledgement and to raise the rainbow flag, which would increase a sense of safety and belonging. Community members have shared their own stories of being marginalized along with the harm a culture of condemnation and silence can cause.

Stated in Toronto Public Health's T.O. Health Check, 2019: Among grade 9 to 12 students in Toronto in 2014, Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual youth had a higher prevalence of suicidal ideation (35%) compared to heterosexual students (12%). An Ontario study found that 35% of transgendered persons reported having considered suicide in the past year, while 11% attempted suicide in the past year. Additional research has established a multitude of mental health inequities in the LGBTQ2S+ community, many of which are due to impacts of homophobia and discrimination.

Canadians and Catholics are both called on to put human dignity at the centre of all decision making. Jesus' message takes it a step further and calls on us to put the poor, outcast, and marginalized ahead of even ourselves, showing us the importance of having an equity lens in decision making.

For these reasons and many more, including basic decency, I am now pleading with the TCDSB to put these vulnerable students first and **raise the rainbow flag during Pride Month** at the Head Office & schools. Empower education staff with equity PD on inclusive language, and resources to create safe spaces. The time for 2SLGBTQ+ students, staff and families to feel acknowledged, welcomed and valued is NOW!