

 **Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association**
TORONTO SECONDARY UNIT

April 23, 2021

Toronto Catholic District School Board
Director of Education

Toronto Catholic District School Board
Board of Trustees

Dear Dr. Browne and Trustees:

It has been quite an extraordinary year for equity initiatives at the TCDSB.

The members of the Toronto Secondary Unit applaud the many changes that the Board has made to proactively address anti-Black racism, to begin to understand structural oppression and issues of privilege, and to celebrate the multiple diversities within our community.

Socioculturally, our celebrations reveal what we value, e.g. African Canadian Heritage Month (and the many other Heritage Months). Conversely, our silences too often reveal that about which we are ashamed.

The historical culture of fear, sanction, silence and shame surrounding 2SLGBTQ+ issues in our Board will be hard to shake. Many teachers continue to be afraid to come out for fear of isolation, harassment, and dismissal. Consequently, 2SLGBTQ+ students (and, in fact, all students) are robbed of positive models of faith-filled, Catholic 2SLGBTQ+ adulthood. Instead, of seeing themselves reflected in the teaching staff, queer students are met with a spectre fear and shame. The message they get is that life does not "get better" and, should they aspire to be teachers, the TCDSB is not a community that would welcome them.

This needs to change.

The Toronto Secondary Unit is asking that June be designated 2SLGBTQ+ Pride Month at the TCDSB. As Catholics, we know how powerful symbols can be. The acknowledgement and celebration of Pride Month at the TCDSB would symbolize a fledgling acknowledgement and celebration of 2SLGBTQ+ students and staff in our community. The raising of the Pride flag at the CEC, and at our schools, would symbolize the centring and recognition of many of the most marginalized and invisible members of our community.

One thing we have learned from our advocacy work is that it is not up to oppressed and marginalized people to "fix the system". Rather, those with power and the safety of privilege must work to eliminate barriers to the full inclusion of all. We pray for all leaders and decision-makers at the TCDSB, that you will have the courage to stand up for those who cannot speak for themselves and take this important step to greater inclusion for 2SLGBTQ+ members of our Catholic community.

Respectfully,



Pete McKay
President, Toronto Secondary Unit