

Catholic Board Council of the
Ontario Student Trustees' Association

All God's Children

A Report of the Catholic Student Position on the
Equity and Inclusion Policy

Equity and Inclusion Committee



2011

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Introduction

Acknowledgements

The report entitled “All God’s Children: A Report of the Catholic Student Position on the Equity and Inclusion Policy” (hereafter called the “Equity and Inclusion Report”) was compiled through the efforts of the members of the Equity and Inclusion Committee of the Catholic Board Council of 2010-2012.

Contributing 2010-2011 members of the Committee:

| | | |
|--------------------|-------------|---------------------|
| Clarisse Schneider | Chairperson | Halton CDSB |
| Olivia Suppa | President | York CDSB |
| Mackenzie Colman | Secretary | Windsor-Essex CDSB |
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The Equity and Inclusion Committee of the Catholic Board Council was initiated at the Board Council Conferences of the Ontario Student Trustees' Association in January 2011. This committee was created to address the Ministry of Education's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy, and to formulate the student perspective in response. The purpose of the committee was to gather and compile the Catholic student perspective on equity and inclusive education in the Catholic high schools of the province of Ontario. The report is a collaborative effort of student trustees who volunteered their time and efforts to reflect and remark on the various aspects of the Ontario Education Services Corporation's (hereafter called OESC) English Catholic Template for an Equity and Inclusive Education policy (Appendix 1).

We sincerely hope that this report enhances comprehension of the student insight on Equity and Inclusion policies in all of our Catholic school boards in Ontario, as well as the possibilities and opportunities that the Equity and Inclusion policies can create.

Letter from the Chairperson

Dear Ministry of Education, Catholic stakeholders, and Catholic school boards of Ontario,

We are pleased to present the most current report from the Catholic Board Council of the Ontario Student Trustees Association. The report, entitled “All God’s Children: A Report of the Catholic Student Position on the Equity and Inclusion Policy”, is a compilation and unified presentation of the student voice in regards to equitable and inclusive education in our Catholic school communities. Through the analysis of the OESC English Catholic Template (Appendix 1), we hope to both clarify the student perspective on the capacity for change that an Equity and Inclusion Policy has in a school board, and offer suggestions to collaboratively work towards creating the ideal learning environment for all Catholic students.

It is our responsibility, as student trustees, to ensure that every student whom we represent has the experience in education that they deserve; every person has the right to be treated with dignity, equity, and respect inside and outside of school. Along with the intellectual growth that the education system provides, we also develop spiritually and emotionally in community with our peers. This spiritual and emotional growth may be stunted by discrimination based on creed, colour, sexual orientation, religion, age, gender, as well as the inability to speak the language of instruction. As Catholic students who have been given the opportunity to make a difference, it is part of our call to speak against these social barriers, and work collaboratively to build a caring Catholic community.

We have been blessed with the Ministry of Education’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy to try to end discrimination in our classroom, school, and board-wide communities. We hope that our report will enlighten and inspire others to join us on our quest to achieve equity and inclusion for all those students we represent.

Yours in Catholic Education,

Patrick Morris and Clarisse Schneider
Equity and Inclusion Committee Chairpersons of 2011-2012 and 2010-2011

Preface

The Equity and Inclusion Committee of the Catholic Board Council was created during the Board Council Conferences of January 2011, in response to the Ministry of Education's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy. Many Catholic student trustees displayed much passion in regards to equity and inclusion in their schools, and had many excellent opinions, suggestions, and ideas. We expressed our enthusiasm for taking the lead on the Equity and Inclusion Report, in order to bring forth the student voice on behalf of our peers who need and deserve support, regardless of ethnicity, gender, religion, social and economic class, age, abilities/disabilities, and sexual orientation. We have been called to action; we have been called to use our voices to speak on behalf of those in our communities, especially the marginalized.

Over the course of ten months, we met regularly to discuss the OESC Equity and Inclusion Policy Template for the English Catholic school boards of Ontario (Appendix 1). Because this template was distributed to all Catholic English boards in Ontario, and was often adopted unmodified as boards' Equity and Inclusion Policy, it is viewed as the basis of English Catholic boards' Equity and Inclusion Policies and the most universal source for the policy. The Equity and Inclusion Report contains the collaborative efforts of the members of the committee as we strive to contribute to the movement for equitable and inclusive education by speaking on behalf of the Catholic students of Ontario.

Premise

The premise of the report is to offer a thorough illustration of an equitable and inclusive education, as seen through the eyes of a Catholic student. We believe that an Equity and Inclusion Policy and corresponding administrative procedures can achieve all that we wish to experience in a school community in terms of equity and inclusion for all students. Every student has the right to feel safe, supported, and treated fairly in their schools and school communities. We have reviewed the 8 sections of the OESC English Catholic template for the Equity and Inclusion Policy, recognizing that they are all equally important to achieving an equitable and inclusive school environment. They are presented in the report in the order in which they appear on the template. Through the analysis of the 8 sections, we hope to clarify the student perspective on each section, as well as provide comprehensive recommendations to work towards an education system in which every student is treated with dignity, equity, and respect.

Preamble

This document includes two columns in which the Equity and Inclusion committee of the Catholic Board Council includes their interpretation of each of the 8 sections of OESC Equity and Inclusion Policy Template for Catholic English boards. The column titled, "Students' Understanding" outlines the committee's understanding of the aim of the template. The committee's stance on the purposed sections of the policy template is outlined in the column titled, "Position."

Investigation

Board Policies, Programs, Procedures, and Practices

Students' Understanding

Each board policy shall reflect principles of equity and inclusivity, and undergo revision and improvement by representatives from a variety of stakeholders to ensure the needs of all students and parties are met. The school board will not tolerate instances of injustice in our schools, and will act appropriately in accordance with guidelines set out in the Ontario Human Rights Code, should a problem arise. The board will look to hire a diverse group of individuals to further display the importance of equity in the workplace, as well as provide training for those in leadership positions to ensure each policy is properly implemented in the school systems.

Position

It is imperative that board policies which reflect our fundamental Catholic values of equity and inclusion receive a collaborative review before implementation. This will allow all stakeholders an opportunity to express their concerns with said policy, thus providing the board with an avenue to maximize the positive impact of these policies on individuals. Ensuring consistency and training is provided in our schools will further contribute to the success of the implementation of these policies. While the majority of implementation is on an individual school basis, it is evident that an abundance of training and information from the board is necessary to have full and complete implementation in our schools.

Whereas

- Whereas, as Catholics, we strive to create equitable and inclusive environments for our schools, because it is important to provide each child with an environment in which they are able to develop to the full potential of students as outlined in Catholic teachings,
- Whereas all schools are responsible to appropriately implement policies striving to create inclusive atmospheres that reflect the views of many and respect the views of all,

We Recommend That:

1. Boards provide comprehensive direction as to the desired effect the policy is to have in the school community.
2. Boards encourage a diverse representation of a variety of stakeholders to express their opinion on said policies targeted at creating inclusive environments.
3. Boards include students, Student Parliaments, Student Senators, and Student Trustees in the discussion and implementation of the policy.
4. Boards create a corresponding Administrative Procedure which aims to provide training for schools to ensure consistency in the equitable and inclusive environments of the schools of the board.

Shared and Committed Leadership

Students' Understanding

The board will provide leadership training opportunities for students, administration, and all staff members to enhance the impact of implementation of Equity and Inclusive Education Policies. They will provide many opportunities for students to participate in leadership initiatives that encourage students to strive to create equitable

environments in our schools. Shared leadership aims to close the achievement gap, and hopes to address all forms of discrimination. The connection between student leadership and student achievement is a critical one; equitable and inclusive education will strive to include the student voice.

Position

Leadership training is an excellent way to motivate staff and students to see that the full implementation of the policy is carried out. Promoting our Catholic views during leadership training sessions also enables students to encompass all the Catholic Graduate Expectations. Also, by striving to ensure

that leadership is shared among all stakeholders, positive and constructive collaboration is encouraged. Jesus calls each one of us to be our best and follow His inspiring example as a leader. We must embrace this call by encouraging all to lead within our boards and schools.

Whereas

- The Ministry of Education's Character Development Initiative states that "The goal of the Character Development Initiative is to develop school environments in which all people – students, teachers, administrators, and support staff – treat each other with care and respect,"
- The Catholic Graduate Expectations state that a Catholic graduate must be "A collaborative contributor who exercises Christian leadership, and works effectively as an interdependent team member,"

We Recommend That:

1. Boards ensure that all students, teachers, and community members encourage our students to be role models.
2. Boards put initiatives in place for students to develop and practice their leadership skills and learn how they can use them to help create and maintain equitable and inclusive school environments.
3. Boards make diverse mentors available to staff and student leaders at all times to assist them in their fight for equity.
4. Board provide similar leadership training to trustees, directors, senior staff, teachers, and admin to ensure continuity and proper implementation for all policies and programs targeted at creating inclusive school environments.

School-Community Relationships

Students' Understanding

The Board acknowledges the importance of involvement of a diverse group of stakeholders in the review, development, implementation, and monitoring of the equity and inclusive education policies. They will encourage engagement from students, parents, staff, and other partners to achieve a positive and inclusive school environment and do their best to remove any barriers that are part of systemic discrimination and that hinder students from reaching their full potential. They will develop a database of information about the diversity of their communities, and use tools such as school climate surveys to identify and work on any problems in the school environment, while still respecting the privacy of their students as per existing board policies. Using community partnerships, the board will try to gather the knowledge and experience of a largely diverse cross-section of students, parents, staff, community members, and businesses in order to better serve their students.

Position

The specific nature of this section of the OESC English Catholic Template for the Equity and Inclusive Education Policy is very much appreciated. By defining the steps that the board will take towards an equitable and inclusive school environment, they are not only increasing public transparency, but creating stability and dependability. However, within the steps outlined, there is room for a broad interpretation. Also, there is nothing about a long-term monitoring system for school-community partnerships.

Whereas

- An Ontario Catholic Graduate is expected to be a collaborative contributor who achieves excellence, originality, and integrity in one's own work and supports these qualities in the work of others; witnesses Catholic social teaching by promoting equality, democracy, and solidarity for a just, peaceful and compassionate society; and respects and affirms the diversity and interdependence of the world's peoples and cultures,
- The gospel of Matthew says in the 15th verse of the 18th chapter, "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over,"

We Recommend That:

1. Boards include the specific tools they wish to use to determine stakeholders' views on school environments and to act on these next steps in a linked administrative procedure.
2. Boards create a process in which community partnerships may be reviewed on a regular basis, as well as an invitational process for partners to come forward to address issues within school communities at the board's discretion.
3. Boards include students in the review of community partnerships and invite

Inclusive Curriculum and Assessment Practices

Students' Understanding

Method of delivery is as important as what is being delivered, in regards to content. Our inclusive curriculum teaches equality, and must work in tandem with methodology outside of classroom curriculum (for example, accepting people regardless of ethnicity, gender, religion, social and economic class, age, abilities/disabilities, and

sexual orientation). Effective evaluation is needed for students to reach their full potential; students must be fairly represented in the assessment process. Overall, students should be active participants in their learning and feel relevance in what they are being taught.

Position

A curriculum that teaches equity and inclusivity is crucial in helping to develop the social consciences of students, but must also be fostered in a school environment that lives out the Catholic message of equity and inclusivity. Students need to feel that

they are part of the decision-making process in regards to their education; that they have a sense of belonging in their school communities; and, most importantly, feel that they are not being discriminated against in any way in their classrooms and school communities.

Whereas

- The Ontario Catholic Graduate Expectations state that a Catholic graduate should be a “collaborative contributor who finds meaning, dignity, and vocation in work which represents the rights of all and contributes to the common good,”
- Catholic virtues are developed through growing in an inclusive school environments,
- The “Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools” document, published by the Ministry of Education in 2009, states that “equitable and inclusive education aims to understand, identify, address, and eliminate biases, barriers, and power dynamics that limit students’ prospects for learning, growing, and fully contributing to society,”
- Whereas barriers may be related to gender, race, ethnic origin, religion, socio-economic background, physical or mental ability, sexual orientation, or other factors,

We Recommend That:

1. Boards review their equity and inclusive education policies with the goal of actively looking into connecting the values described in the aforementioned policies with their school environment.
2. Boards mandate that schools encourage students to be aware of assessment practices, and work with the students to improve and build on skills already learned, making sure there are no biases affecting the assessment ratings.
3. Boards create a systematic opportunity for students to timely review their assessments without negative consequences.

Religious Accommodation

Students' Understanding

Each student has the right to learn and work in an environment where everyone is treated with dignity, equity, and respect. The board will attempt to provide reasonable accommodation for religious beliefs and practices of students and staff, but while protecting its denominational rights. They will consult with individuals of religious diversities in the Board while developing and implementing the Equity and Inclusion policy, and provide reasonable religious accommodation in accordance with a guideline which prohibits discrimination on the grounds of creed. They must also inform students, parents/guardians, and staff of their right to request religious accommodation.

Position

Though our school boards are Catholic, students of other religions and cultures may choose to attend our schools. As Catholics, it is our responsibility to embody the respect for equality that Jesus portrayed in his life. There is no excuse for a student to feel harassed, be put through undue hardship, or be unable to freely practice their religion, no matter their beliefs.

Whereas

- As Catholics, we are called not to compare our ideals with other religions' practices, but rather our ideals with their ideals and our practice with their practice, as outlined in the fourth principle of inter-religious dialogue described in the Journal of Ecumenical Studies 20:1,
- Every person has the freedom of religion, and the right to equal benefit of the law regardless of religion, as prescribed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms,
- Each Ontario Catholic Graduate is expected to be a discerning believer formed in the Catholic faith community who respects the faith traditions, world religions, and the life-journeys of all people of good will,

We Recommend That:

1. Boards continue to mandate that schools create a safe and comfortable environment for non-Catholic beliefs within their schools.

School Climate and the Prevention of Discrimination and Harassment

Students' Understanding

The board stresses the importance of the connection between equitable and inclusive education and positive student behaviour, and the consistency of equity and inclusion with the Catholic faith. The board says it will implement strategies to identify and remove discriminatory barriers that limit engagement, as well as initiate safe reporting procedures and progressive discipline programs, such as peer mediation and restorative justice. They will also revise and implement an effective code of conduct that reflects the needs of a diverse Catholic community.

Position

As Catholics students, we are strongly against discrimination and harassment of any kind. However, the policy does not name any specific forms of discrimination and grounds of harassment. Without defining prohibited grounds of discrimination in the policy, discretion is left to the administration of each school to define it. We believe that it would send a much stronger message to put the prohibited grounds of discrimination in the policy itself.

Whereas

- All Ontario Catholic Graduates are expected to be responsible citizens who respect and affirm the diversity and interdependence of the worlds' peoples and cultures, and also witness Catholic social teaching by promoting equality, democracy, and solidarity for a just, peaceful, and compassionate society,
- The bible says that there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for we are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:28),
- We are all created equal in the loving image of God, and the sole and final judge of all people is Jesus Christ,
- Nearly half of all students who responded to the Ontario Student Survey said they had been or are being bullied,
- 11.2% of the population of Canada are visible minorities,
- 1 in 10 hate crimes are motivated by sexual orientation,
- 345 000 Ontario students live in impoverished conditions,

We Recommend That:

1. Boards encourage equity groups in their schools to bring awareness to different issues and situations that their peers face.
2. Boards hold a Professional Development day on the topic of zero-tolerance for all types of discrimination and harassment and dealing with particular situations.
3. Schools hold "safe-space" student forums to discuss areas of discrimination and to generate ideas to combat the barriers created by discrimination in their own specific school communities.
4. Schools implement anti-bullying groups which specifically target areas of bullying which are prominent in their schools.

Professional Learning Students' Understanding

Professional development creates a foundation for Catholic values, human rights education, effective teaching practices, and ecclesial and cultural identity. It also includes preventative initiatives. Furthermore, professional learning increases the knowledge and skills of teachers, therefore engaging students. Perpetual professional learning is the groundwork for positive change in schools. It must include the creation and sharing of knowledge in order to ensure that all voices are represented. Boards are committed to providing the school community, including students, opportunity to acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviours needed to identify and eliminate discriminatory biases and systematic barriers.

Whereas

- The 2304th Catechism of the Catholic Church states that “respect for and development of human life requires peace... Peace cannot be attained on earth without safeguarding the goods of persons’ free communication among men, respect for dignity of persons and peoples, and the assiduous practice of fraternity... Peace is the work of justice and the effect of charity,”

Position

Professional learning, especially relating to equity and inclusivity, should include students, teachers, administrators, curriculum consultants, secretaries, superintendents, and all other members of the board. Professional learning must be sustainable; in order to truly achieve the goals in mind, there must be an additional method to ensure its continued impact (for example, “Challenge Days” with follow-up through the year).

We Recommend That:

1. Boards provide ongoing opportunities for students, administrators, teachers, support, board staff, and trustees to participate in equity and inclusive education training and leadership initiatives.
2. Boards ensure that equity and inclusive education is incorporated within curriculum, by using a diverse representation of resources and allowing open, safe discussion in the classroom.

Accountability and Transparency

Students' Understanding

Boards will report their goals and progress in the areas of policy review, school improvement planning, and implementation of their own strategies. They will also embed the principles of Equity and Inclusive Education into all Board policies, programs, guidelines, and practices, and will communicate such to the community. Engagement of students, parents, staff, and community partners in the development of equitable and inclusive policies will be extremely important. Moreover, the board and school improvement teams will work to raise awareness about discriminatory practices and act on racism and other equity issues, with emphasis on using data to identify and remove barriers on student achievement.

Position

Student Trustees should be involved in the process of developing equitable and inclusive policies, and all aspects of the school board should be equitable and inclusive. However, boards must ensure that there will be action with regards to awareness and combat for issues like racism, sexism, etc. that deal with equitable and inclusive education.

Whereas

- Students seek guidance and direction to a path of wisdom acceptance and tolerance from Administration, Trustees, Directors of Education and members of the clergy.

We Recommend That:

1. Boards develop information-gathering strategies, such as student forums and Student Surveys, to culminate data to see which issues in particular need to be addressed.
2. Boards ensure all parties and stakeholders, especially students, are involved in the process of making sure our Catholic education is equitable and inclusive.

Conclusion

Recommendations

1. Boards provide comprehensive direction as to the desired effect the policy is to have in the school community.
2. Boards encourage a diverse representation of a variety of stakeholders to express their opinion on said policies targeted at creating inclusive environments.
3. Boards include students, Student Parliaments, Student Senators, and Student Trustees in the discussion and implementation of the policy.
4. Boards create a corresponding Administrative Procedure which aims to provide training for schools to ensure consistency in the equitable and inclusive environments of the schools of the board.
5. Boards ensure that all students, teachers, and community members encourage our students to be role models.
6. Boards put initiatives in place for students to develop and practice their leadership skills and learn how they can use them to help create and maintain equitable and inclusive school environments.
7. Boards make diverse mentors available to staff and student leaders at all times to assist them in their fight for equity.
8. Board provide similar leadership training to trustees, directors, senior staff, teachers, and admin to ensure continuity and proper implementation for all policies and programs targeted at creating inclusive school environments.
9. Boards include the specific tools they wish to use to determine stakeholders' views on school environments and to act on these next steps in a linked administrative procedure.
10. Boards create a process in which community partnerships may be reviewed on a regular basis, as well as an invitational process for partners to come forward to address issues within school communities at the board's discretion.
11. Boards include students in the review of community partnerships and invite representatives from all schools to identify barriers and next steps.
12. Boards review their equity and inclusive education policies with the goal of actively looking into connecting the values described in the aforementioned policies with their school environment.
13. Boards mandate that schools encourage students to be aware of assessment practices, and work with the students to improve and build on skills already learned, making sure there are no biases affecting the assessment ratings.
14. Boards create a systematic opportunity for students to timely review their assessments without negative consequences

15. Boards continue to mandate that schools create a safe and comfortable environment for non-Catholic beliefs within their schools.
16. Boards encourage equity groups in their schools to bring awareness to different issues and situations that their peers face.
17. Boards hold a Professional Development day on the topic of zero-tolerance for all types of discrimination and harassment and dealing with particular situations.
18. Schools hold “safe-space” student forums to discuss areas of discrimination and to generate ideas to combat the barriers created by discrimination in their own specific school communities.
19. Schools implement anti-bullying groups which specifically target areas of bullying which are prominent in their schools.
20. Boards provide ongoing opportunities for students, administrators, teachers, support, board staff, and trustees to participate in equity and inclusive education training and leadership initiatives.
21. Boards ensure that equity and inclusive education is incorporated within curriculum, by using a diverse representation of resources and allowing open, safe discussion in the classroom.
22. Boards develop information-gathering strategies, such as student forums and Student Surveys, to culminate data to see which issues in particular need to be addressed.
23. Boards ensure all parties and stakeholders, especially students, are involved in the process of making sure our Catholic education is equitable and inclusive.

Summary

Through this analysis, we have provided the student trustees’ understanding of each section of the OESC English Catholic Template for the Equity and Inclusive Education Policy, as well as the student perspective of the proposed policy under each heading, and recommendations for the boards to improve and further strengthen their policy for the students with whose education they are entrusted.

We strongly urge the English Catholic School Boards of Ontario to consider these recommendations seriously and dialogue regularly with their students and student trustees for more in-depth information, as well as ideas for methods with the aim of achieving a truly equitable and inclusive education for all students.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Ontario Education Services Corporation's English Catholic Template for an Equity and Inclusive Education policy

