

Catholic school trustees may censor student surveys

■ By David Lea
OAKVILLE BEAVER STAFF

Some student surveys may soon find themselves unwelcome within the schools of the Halton Catholic District School Board after trustees passed a motion, last Tuesday, that would require their approval before they reach the classroom.

The motion, introduced by Joanne Matters, called on staff to draft a policy, 'allowing for trustee approval of surveys and pilot projects, which are morally sensitive or controversial in nature, conducted under the auspices of the Halton Catholic District School Board.'

"It is necessary for trustees to be made aware of such surveys and pilot projects that impact the students entrusted to our care before such surveys and pilot projects are initiated," said Matters in her rationale for the motion.

"While it is recognized that many surveys and pilot projects of varying origins and intentions are routinely implemented within the Board, the intent

of this policy is to address those surveys and pilot projects that are of a serious nature."

Many trustees immediately voiced concerns with the practical implications of such a motion.

"Who is going to decide what surveys (are examined) and what surveys are of a morally contentious nature," said Oakville trustee Alice Anne LeMay.

"What is a controversial survey?" asked Burlington student trustee Ryan Durran.

Matters did not provide a specific example or any indication of the type of surveys the board was hoping to guard against noting that these questions would be dealt with at a later date.

"That's something that can be addressed in the policy that will be developed by our staff," she said. "It's a good question and we have to grapple with that. On one hand it's quite complicated, and on the other it's quite simple and obvious."

Oakville Trustee Anthony Danko also noted that these kinds of questions were prema-

ture.

"The intent of this motion is really to be a starting point to draft a policy," he said. "If passed, we would begin developing these guidelines."

Durran expressed fear over where he believes this policy is going and how it will effect students.

"I have problems with a policy which says that surveys and pilot projects emanating from the board have to be vetted for controversial or morally-sensitive material. I think the staff of the board is sensitive to morally sensitive issues," he said. "I think this opens the door to arbitrary moral judgments."

This call for required trustee approval of surveys and pilot projects comes in the wake of the Halton Youth Survey created by the 'Our Kids Network.'

Asking questions like, 'in the last 12 months, have you seriously considered suicide or taking your own life,' the survey was issued to schools throughout the Halton. The survey was not well-received by some parents who brought their concerns to local trustees.

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