

Board equity policy 'unbalanced'— Rowe

The Halton Catholic District School Board will take a second look at its controversial policy banning gay-straight student clubs at its schools.

The policy committee voted 6-2 Tuesday to recommend the board rescind its operating policy on equity and inclusive education.

That policy, approved by the former board last November and which bans gay-straight student clubs, has sparked outrage from human rights groups, inspired a Facebook protest petition and caused a flurry on the Internet.

Newly-elected Halton Hills Trustee John Mark Rowe made the motion that the board replace the policy with one issued by the Ontario Education Services Corp.

Rowe called the board's four-page equity policy "poorly thought out" and "unbalanced."

"It looked totally deficient and couldn't give good direction to the staff," Rowe said after the meeting. "I felt that it does need to be looked at again."

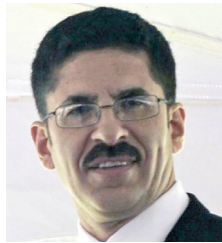
The ban on student gay-straight alliances dominated discussion at the meeting.

Paul Marai, a newly-elected Halton Catholic board trustee who is gay, raised the issue and asked how such a ban was written into the board's policy on equity and inclusive education. He vowed to fight the ban and told the policy committee it has "damaged the reputation of the board."

"This specific part of the policy must be

revisited immediately," Marai said, adding his constituents had made it clear it did not reflect their views.

Several policy committee members cautioned against rushing into drafting a new policy and said many of their constituents favoured keeping the ban.



MARK ROWE

Student trustee Clarisse Schneider spoke out against the wording in the current policy and urged the board to consider the students and their best interests. "The message we are sending to my fellow students is two-fold and simple," said Schneider, a Grade 11 student at St. Ignatius of Loyola in Oakville.

"First it is saying that supporting our gay peers and accepting them is wrong, that being yourself is wrong. A gay-straight alliance is nothing to do with homosexual activity, it is about acceptance and belonging, what this very policy tries to achieve. The second, our actions teach our students that if you don't agree with something then ban it. Is that what we teach children in our care?"

Schneider called for compromise and proposed that the revisions, if approved, create a Catholic gay-straight alliance group that "encompasses the Catholic teachings but also the support for our fellow gay students or for those who one day might identify as being gay."

The next meeting of the school board is Jan. 19.

—Torstar News Service



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