

## COMMENT

# Students could teach these trustees a lesson

By David Churchill

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David Churchill

I don't mean to shock anybody here, but I'm going to let you in on a little secret. There are gays and lesbians in Georgetown.

They're in our neighbourhoods, our workplaces, our churches and even in our schools.

That may be news to Halton Catholic District School Board trustees, who two weeks ago surprised the Ministry of Education and even the head of their own board when they failed to ratify a provincially mandated anti-bullying policy.

Led by trustee Anthony Quinn of Oakville, four trustees balked at supporting the policy over concerns that Catholic values may come in conflict with the views or lifestyles of gay, lesbian or otherwise different students. Basically, if the church teaches students that they shouldn't be gay, then they damn well shouldn't be gay.

That's my interpretation. Here's Quinn's own words.

In an email to the *Toronto Star* he said the policy left me wondering what could happen when students have disagreements on issues of sexual morality? ... Could the teachings of the Catholic faith and the verbal expression of those teachings cause students to be disciplined if they led to another student not feeling safe or welcomed?

Sexual morality? Does that mean gay and lesbian students or students who engage in sexual activity shouldn't feel welcome or safe in our high schools.

My next thought was that I would love to introduce Mr. Quinn to a few young people I know. People who have been bullied for growing up different, to learn what it's like to survive high school as an outsider. But then it only took me a few seconds to recall that Quinn was one of the trustees who didn't want Gay-Straight Alliance groups in our schools at all. Not much chance of a change of heart there.

For the record, the other three trustees who

voted against the bullying policy were Anthony Danko of Oakville, Helena Kerabela of Oakville and Susan Trites of Burlington. Other trustees are fully supportive of the policy.

The whole mess becomes even sillier when you realize that the bullying policy was supported unanimously by these same trustees at a committee meeting earlier this month. Quinn did not attend that meeting.

Our Halton Hills Catholic trustee, John Mark Rowe, who was a teacher for more than 30 years before becoming a trustee, said he was disappointed at how the vote went.

I was disappointed that a trustee that had missed the policy meeting, convinced enough trustees to vote against it, even though they had considered it the previous week and voted for it, Rowe told me in an email.

The only good news is that Quinn's attempt to block the policy will likely be short-lived. The policy is expected to come before trustees again at their next meeting. The one trustee who missed the recent vote is expected to attend and that should be enough to carry the vote, even if the four who voted against it two weeks ago stick to their position.

But to those gay and lesbian students in our schools, the message has already been delivered loud and clear. Despite all the good work going on in schools to support students of all beliefs and lifestyles, including Christ the King in Georgetown, these four trustees have shown there's still work to be done. And that's a shame.

David Churchill is a longtime journalist who writes about family, life in Georgetown and a love of travel. Follow him on Twitter @ChurchillDJ



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