

GDHS hosts fourth-annual LGBT-inclusive dance

By Kathryn Boyle
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For the fourth year in a row, the Halton Catholic District School Board and the Halton District School Board will be supporting an lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual (LGBT)-inclusive dance, and this year, the event is being hosted at Georgetown District High School (GDHS).

On Thursday, April 13, from 7-10 p.m., GDHS will dress up its gymnasium to host the fourth-annual Pride Dance. The dance is not just a way for students to let loose, but a way for students to express themselves openly in a safe environment.

Kyle O Neil, the staff advisor for the school's Gender-Sexuality Alliance (GSA) club, said hosting this event reflects well on the community and creates an all-inclusive space for students in the area.

As a school, we always try and reflect our student body, and create a safe space for everyone, O Neil said. There are many different kinds of students that we have here. Our goal is to create a safe place in terms of sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression.

Last year, the opportunity came up for GDHS to host the event, and the school jumped on the chance.

We thought it would be important up in the north here, for the community, so we could be a leader in the community of creating safe, inclusive environments for people in the school but also in the community in general, O Neil said. It's also a good way to showcase our community to the rest of the region, because we have students from all over the school board coming out here.

The GSA club sprouted more than eight years ago from an existing club, the Social

Justice League, which focuses on a broad spectrum of social issues. Wanting to focus more on issues having to do with homophobia, a few students created the GSA, and asked O Neil to be its advisor.

(The group does) activities in the school and makes efforts to improve inclusivity and equity in the schools, O Neil said. Specifically, fight against homophobia and antitransphobia, and create more inclusive spaces in the school.

For schools that have GSAs, those clubs don't just make it safer for the students involved in the GSA, but they tend to make (the school) a safer place for the student body as a whole, he said. It's really important for every school to have something like that as a part of a broader goal of reflecting the school and supporting all the different types of students, and staff members, they have at the school.

The dance, which has a *Harry Potter* theme, will also include a DJ and live musician, door prizes, food and some community groups who will have tables on display.

Any high school student in the Halton district and Halton Catholic district school boards is invited. Tickets can be purchased at GDHS, through O Neil, and also through the Halton Positive Space Network. Tickets are \$10 and are all-inclusive.

The Town of Halton Hills has made efforts to creating safe spaces. In January 2016, council held a mock meeting at Acton High School and listened to the concerns of the students, one of which being the lack of gender-neutral washrooms. After the meeting, the town installed new signage for the washrooms in a number of town buildings, and sent a copy of the motion to the Halton Region, Burlington, Oakville and Milton.

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