



Bernard Weil, Toronto Star

Education Minister Indira Naidoo-Harris: "It was clear that there were a number of diverse voices in the community who had strong opinions on this motion and really wanted to be heard."

Halton Catholic school board suspends controversial fundraising policy

KRISTIN RUSHOWY

Ontario's education minister says she is "pleased and encouraged" the Halton Catholic board has put a pause on a controversial policy that limited student fundraising to charities that align with religious values.

"It was clear that there were a number of diverse voices in the community who had strong opinions on this motion and really wanted to be heard," Indira Naidoo-Harris said in an interview. "I'm looking forward to having them consider all of the voices in their community."

In February, the board voted in favour of a "Sanctity of Life" motion, meaning it would "not provide or facilitate any financial donations to any charities or non-profits that publicly support, either directly or indirectly, abortion, contraception, sterilization, euthanasia or embryonic stem cell research."

The lack of public input on the move prompted an outcry from teachers, parents and students - who held a number of school walkouts in protest - and even a

letter from Naidoo-Harris requesting the pause, which trustees initially rebuffed.

However, last Tuesday (May 1), they voted to put the motion on hold until "the completion of community consultations."

That means that in the interim, schools and parent councils may again fundraise for the Canadian Cancer Society, the United Way, for shelters for abused women - all banned under the original policy.

"I am really pleased and encouraged that they decided to take that step" to suspend the policy, Naidoo-Harris said, adding she expects they will "consult with the community in a fulsome and comprehensive way so that all of those diverse voices are heard, and the policies reflect the voices that they hear."

The board is seeking input on the policy until the first of June, and it will be discussed by trustees at a subsequent meeting.

Even Premier Kathleen Wynne spoke of the tumult, saying "there are very, very concerned students and teachers in the board."

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