

ALL STUDENTS DESERVE SAME OPPORTUNITY: BARAKAT

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portunity for students. Yet they're not allowing non-Catholics to excel at the rate the Catholics are," she said. "Though my school community is very diverse, that is not necessarily reflected in the board."

This leaves Barakat — and other non-Catholic students in Halton Hills and across the region — at a disadvantage, she says, as it prevents them from receiving a potential scholarship of \$2,500 for serving in the position and becoming a voice at the table in board meetings.

The 16-year-old recently launched an online petition to call on the board to amend policy I-26 to allow non-Catholics to be student trustees. It has garnered more than 200 signatures so far.

Barakat also delegated at a recent board meeting with fellow students Katrina Lefebvre, Alisa Robinson and Nicole Arango — all Catholics — to shed light on the issue.

Robinson said the board is "in need of greater diversity," while Lefebvre noted that the barrier means there "is an inaccurate representation of what the HCDSB school communities look like." Arango told the board that it already allows non-Catholics to enroll, "so why should we stop them from applying to leadership roles?"

During the discussion, Oakville trustee Peter DeRosa said that although the board tries to be inclusive, it has a fundamental obligation to make strategic decisions and policies within the Catholic lens.

That's why DeRosa said he can't reconcile the ap-

peal to bring non-Catholics into a board environment — though another trustee from Oakville, Nancy Guzzo, shared the current reality of how student trustees "unfortunately" don't have a binding vote under the Education Act.

Barakat said that she was put into a Catholic school because her parents believed in the ethics and moral foundations of the school.

"But they also wanted me to be treated the same as the peers that I sit with at lunch," she said. Earlier, she said that "you do not have to be Catholic to demonstrate Catholic teachings or ethics."

Board chair Patrick Murphy thanked the delegates after the presentation, saying "it's so important to hear your lived experience and for us to have that information to perco-



Graham Paine/Metroland

Raghad Barakat hopes to change a Halton Catholic District School Board rule that only allows Catholics to serve as student trustees.

late and enter into our discussions."

The board of trustees then voted to receive the information.

An earlier attempt by Guzzo to send the issue back to the policy committee for further review and "to allow a fulsome conversation" failed to get enough support.

Barakat said that "it's

not an individual issue" and that she has every intention of keeping the conversation going, citing the "overwhelming" support she received from students and community members — Catholics and non-Catholics alike.

"The plan is to keep putting pressures on these trustees," she said, adding that she is in contact with

some who are supportive. The group is also working toward getting a full backing from the Catholic board student senate.

Even though she was once told that as a minority she's going to have to give up on certain things, she believes that all Canadian citizens "deserve equality."

"We're just asking for eligibility to run ... just for the opportunity. The same opportunity that our Catholic peers have," she said.

STORY BEHIND THE STORY: Upon hearing of a local student's efforts to overturn a Halton Catholic District School Board rule that prohibits non-Catholics from serving as student trustees, we wanted to examine how students and trustees felt about the issue.



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“Give Where You Live”

It is April and time for the “Give Where You Live” campaign in support of Cancer Assistance Services of Halton Hills (CASh). This year our campaign will look a little different. CASh will no longer be conducting an in person door-to-door campaign and this year, due to COVID-19, we also will not be doing our door hangers. We still need your help through your generous donations.

You can donate in a number of ways;

- On line ‘single’ or ‘monthly’ donations through our website at www.cancerassistance.org/donate/
- Mail a cheque to the CASh office.
- Donation drop off at the CASh Office Mailbox (contact the office for location).

Did you know?

- CASh provides free transportation and practical home care support to our clients.
- We do not receive any government funding nor are we associated with any cancer organization.
- We rely on our April Campaign to generate a large portion of our income for the year.
- We rely on the generosity of our volunteers, donors and fundraising events to support our mission to help those dealing with a cancer diagnosis in our community.

Thank you to all of the wonderful volunteers and generous donors in the community of Halton Hills. We cannot do what we do without you!

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www.cancerassistance.org

222 Mountainview Road North,
Georgetown, ON L7G 3R2

Phone 905-702-8886

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