

# HUNDREDS HAVE SIGNED PETITION TO CHANGE POLICY

Continued from page 1

across the region claiming the policy discriminates against non-Catholics.

The policy states that nominees for the position must, among other requirements, have "active parish membership and regular mass attendance."

That restriction — student Kaileen Valencia points out — has real financial consequences behind it.

"When you are elected to be a student trustee, you are also awarded a scholarship of \$2,500, which is something non-Catholics are excluded from because they are not able to run for the position at all," said Valencia.

Other advantages provided by the position include a letter of commendation from the chair and an ability to take part in board decisions albeit with a non-binding vote.

Trustee Peter DeRosa has defended the policy arguing they



Roland Cilliers/Metroland  
**HCDSB trustee Peter DeRosa has been a defender of a policy that requires student trustees to be Catholic.**

have an obligation to make decisions through a Catholic lens. During the May 4 board meeting, he interrupted the student delegate, who was answering his question regarding how the policy removes an opportunity for non-Catholics.

"The \$2,500 is a consequence of

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- student Kaileen Valencia

being able to apply and run for a student trustee. Anything prior to that I would suggest, and again I'm trying to clarify, non-Catholic students have the same accessibility as Catholic students; it's only after you've been voted to sit on the board you'd be qualified for the \$2,500 grant," said DeRosa.

Other opponents to allowing non-Catholics argue it's not a board decision. According to the Ontario Education Services Corporation, a person has to be Roman Catholic if running for a

Catholic school board trustee seat. If that rule is applied to student trustee seats as well, then the decision would need to be made at a higher level.

Support for a change to the board's policy has led to a petition with over 360 signatures.

Valencia quoted Leviticus 19:33-34 in her delegation: "when a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them."

"My non-Catholic peers are not foreigners, but they are treated as such when they are not

granted the same opportunities as me and my Catholic peers. Non-Catholic students take the same Catholic religion courses as me, come to the same school assemblies, masses and strive just as hard to be active in our board communities and are also Catholic ratepayers. So, how are we prohibiting them from representing themselves?" said Valencia.

*STORY BEHIND THE STORY: Over the last few months, the school board has had to respond to calls for what students feel is a more inclusive system. We felt this was another chance to look at the clash between a more modern student body and a traditional administration.*



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