

# NO EVIDENCE OF BIAS BY CATHOLIC BOARD CHAIR: REPORT

**BUT TRUSTEE CONDUCT INVESTIGATION FINDS FACTIONALISM, DYSFUNCTION**

**ROLAND CILLIERS**  
rcilliers@metroland.com

An investigation into trustee conduct at Halton Catholic District School Board (HCDSB) meetings has vindicated the chair of bias.

However, not all the findings are favourable for those around the board table — with examples of "factionalism" and "dysfunction" being cited.

Included in the agenda package of the Sept. 7 regular board meeting for the

HCDSB — which oversees schools in Halton Hills and across the region — was a report from the investigation into trustee conduct.

Prepared by Barry Bresner of the conflict resolution services agency ADR Chambers Inc., the investigation involved the analysis of meeting recordings between December 2020 and June of this year.

The investigation was requested by the board in June after months of meetings that included multiple calls to order, agendas regularly left incomplete at the end of meeting time, trustees interrupting one another, threats of disabling trustee microphones and criticisms by ratepayers and students around trustee conduct.

In the roughly 30-page report, Bresner said he found no grounds that



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**A report on the conduct of Halton Catholic District School Board trustees found that chair Patrick Murphy had not demonstrated bias in his decisions.**

board chair Patrick Murphy had been biased in his decisions or behaviour.

"Having listened to over 50 hours of board meetings, I do not share trustee (Peter) DeRosa's sense that the chair has acted in a manner that is unfair or unbal-

anced," reads the report. "He has stayed calm and respectful in emotionally-charged debates and has sought to ensure that all trustees have the same opportunity to express themselves."

Bresner stated, "The allegations of bias or improper conduct by the chair must be viewed in context." He refers to the fact that trustees Vincent Iantomasi and DeRosa — from whom the allegations emanate — are both former board chairs, and that Iantomasi was defeated for that position by Murphy in December 2020.

The investigation sought to answer two other questions: whether the conduct of trustees was compliant with board policies regarding civil behaviour, and whether there has been behaviour in general that

has not been in the best interest of the board and student achievement.

The report concluded that while behaviour may have become heated at meetings, it rarely crossed the line.

The report credits much of the "dysfunction" at the board to what it describes as its factionalism, which regularly sees trustees voting as a bloc "regardless of the issues." As a result, many decisions before the board are decided by a vote from the chair, which resulted in allegations of bias.

The extensive breakdown of meetings finds that while clashes are common at the board meeting, they have not extended into name calling, direct insults or other seriously disruptive behaviour.

It does identify that the minority group of trustees

have used parliamentary procedures to frustrate and delay the majority's agenda that is "arguably in breach of the trustees' duties under the Education Act."

For example, at the April 26 meeting wherein the question of raising a Pride flag at schools was discussed, trustee Tim O'Brien made a number of amendments to the motion, including a proposal to strike out an almost full page of action items from it. He attempted to postpone the motion indefinitely twice, and unsuccessfully proposed an "objection to the consideration of the question," which would have removed the flag raising motion entirely.

However, the report states this does not necessarily constitute a breach of

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