

STUDENTS PASSIONATE ABOUT CHANGING RULE

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they hire," said Raghad Barakat, a student at St. Francis Xavier Secondary School in Milton who delegated before the board again on Oct. 5. Raghad and other students — in Halton Hills and across the region — were disappointed in the board's response to previous delegations and a promise to review the policy.

"Nothing is stopping us from taking out the policy. It is not in the Constitution for student trustees to be Catholic in a Catholic board. It is well within your right to keep it like that; however, nothing is stopping you from changing it," she said.

HCDSB's reasoning is that although student trustees' votes are non-binding, they can influence elected trustees in the management of the board and therefore form part of the management of the school board.

Student trustees are leaders, but they are not staff, argued Barakat.

Given that this issue has come up repeatedly, Burlington trustee Brenda Agnew supported sending it

"We continue to push back against these changes that we should be embracing and welcoming."

- trustee Nancy Guzzo

back to policy for a more fulsome discussion.

"We have talked about equity and equitable access to these opportunities and given that we do have a significant proportion of our students in our secondary system who are not Catholic, I do believe it warrants further conversation," said Agnew.

Oakville student trustee Katie Bowie suggested a compromise might be to create a leadership role for non-Catholics but not under the title of trustee; however, she noted she is "wholeheartedly in support of the delegation."

"Please do listen to our students. I know Raghad and the senate as a whole are very passionate about this ... because it is something that is very important to our students," said Katie.

Oakville trustee Nancy Guzzo said she is "unsure" why trustees are not listen-

ing to their student body.

"We continue to push back against these changes that we should be embracing and welcoming ... I don't understand why we're all sitting here around the table if we refuse to listen to what our students have to say and what they're asking us to do, at least for us to explore ..."

Vice-chair Marvin Duarte felt trustees should await the result of a current lawsuit against York Catholic District School Board after a student was denied eligibility for a student trustee position, a suggestion shut down by Agnew.

"There's no reason why we can't make a decision that is important for our students, what they have asked for, what we would like to see happen, regardless of what is happening with another board in the court system right now,"



Graham Paine/Metroland

Raghad Barakat is among those pushing to change the rule that excludes non-Catholics from serving as student trustees with the Halton Catholic District School Board.

said Agnew.

"It's not deniable we have the right to make the decision," commented board chair Patrick Murphy. "That really is not the question. Just because we have the right to make that decision, is it the right decision? Is it the right policy? Does it serve our students well? Is it equitable? What message is the policy sending? Is it consistent with our Catholic teachings?"

The role of student trustee is to inform trustees through a Catholic lens and if you're not Catholic,

it's more difficult to do that, but if the majority of student trustees are Catholic, then the board can ensure that happens, he added.

"We're living in a different age than when these laws and rules were established. Nobody had the notion that we would attract so many non-Catholic students to our system ... and that's wonderful."

In the end, trustees agreed to receive the report as information.

STORY BEHIND THE STORY: The Halton Cath-

olic District School Board is being pressured by students to revise its policy that prevents non-Catholics from becoming student trustees, but the board has yet to yield. We wanted to see how trustees would react to students' persistence as they were confronted with yet another delegation on the subject at the latest board meeting.



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