

# PARENTS' GROUP AMONG THOSE PLEASED WITH DECISION

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School, who spearheaded the movement to raise the flag, said they were grateful trustees were willing to listen.

"Upon hearing the final decision of the board, I was absolutely overwhelmed with joy. I immediately burst into tears, a very different kind of tears from the ones I shed at the previous decision last April. I couldn't stop smiling for a good twenty minutes, and could hardly believe what had just happened," Hotchkiss said.

Despite the motion passing, the meeting was heated at times, with repeated arguing among trustees. At one point, a trustee was told they were out of order during the questioning of a delegate; there were regular incidents of crosstalk; a trustee told the chair that proper procedure was not

being followed, and multiple point of order calls were made.

This year's Pride flag motion was made by Burlington trustee Brenda Agnew, who argued that the flag was about showing 2SLGBTQ+ students and staff that they are welcome at the board. She believed the reason the motion passed this time and not last year was a combination of factors, including that trustees saw the outpouring of support for this motion.

"I perhaps wonder if some of the trustees were just not ready last year to take this step in this motion... it was probably a lot to perhaps digest," said Agnew.

Eight delegations about the Pride flag were on the evening's agenda — six in favour, two against. Nine delegations were declined.

Supporters of raising the flag argue it would help 2SLGBTQ+ staff and students feel accepted and help address significant mental health issues within that community.

Ian McCombe, with Halton Parents for Change, a parent advocacy group formed in response to last year's Pride flag vote, said in his delegation to the board that the effect of last year's vote against flying the flag had a serious effect on many students.

"During the course of the debate, there were many harmful things said in letters of correspondence, during delegations and across the wider community that left an indelible mark on our school board. We heard from many 2SLGBTQ+ students and community members who had to turn off those board meetings because



Carolyn Hotchkiss photo

Nic Hotchkiss led the push to have the Pride flag raised at Halton's Catholic schools.

what was being said was so hurtful. This is not OK," said McCombe.

Opponents to flying the Pride flag argued that it is contrary to the message of the Catholic faith and that it represents immoral behaviours, and also that there are already symbols at use in the schools that foster inclusion for all.

Mark Huschilt told the board during his delegation that they should instead display the Sacred

Heart of Jesus in June.

"In speaking with other parents in Burlington, I can report that there is a sense of discouragement, frustration and anxiety due to these outside ideologies being forced on our schools and our students. Also, it distracts from Catholic teachable moments and does not make sense. The people promoting flying the Pride flag are seen as forcing this issue in a bullying fashion," said

Huschilt.

Similar to last year's debate on flying the Pride flag, opponents attempted to make multiple changes or delays to the motion. Those attempts were unsuccessful this time around.

Veronica Touhey, a parent with children at the board and the other delegate who spoke against flying the flag, said doing so would not be in keeping with the Catholic faith.

Trustees Brenda Agnew, Patrick Murphy, Nancy Guzzo, Peter DeRosa and Janet O'Hearn-Czarnota voted in favour. Trustees Tim O'Brien, Helena Karabela and Vincent Iantomasi voted against.

*STORY BEHIND THE STORY: The question of the Pride flag has proved controversial at the Catholic school board for the last year. We wanted to take a closer look at why people are so passionate on both sides of the debate.*

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