Hello and welcome to the Halton Youth for Pride 2021 event today

We would first like to acknowledge that our event is situated on the traditional territory of the Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, and the Huron-Wendat; now home to many First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. We acknowledge the current treaty holders, the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. We also recognize the lasting presence and deep traditional knowledge and viewpoints of the Indigenous people with whom we share this land.

We have gathered today - virtual and online - because on April 26th, the Halton Catholic District School Board made a decision to not raise the Pride flag for the month of June. This decision shows that the Halton Catholic District School Board does not believe in treating all students as equals or in education without discrimination. This decision is about more than just a flag, it’s about the acceptance of 2SLGBTQ+ students who deserve an accessible education just like any other child.

The 2SLGBTQ+ community should not be ashamed of who they are. The students and faculty of the HCDSB should be able to love who they want and should not be ashamed of who they are. No one should be ashamed of who they are. Children are being shamed, bullied, and put to silence, and as a school board it should be their job to allow them to be who they really are, and not give in to these hateful acts. This silence teaches people that unless they are cis-gendered and heterosexual, they are wrong. Police-reported hate crimes targeting sexual orientation increased 41% in 2019 to 263 incidents and 75% of police-reported hate crimes in all of Canada were related to sexual orientation.

More and more people are coming out as part of the 2SLGBTQ+ community because they are starting to feel more comfortable in their society, however, the Catholic school board is not flying the flag and avoids developing a curriculum that educates about the LGBT topics. According to PrevNet, Canada’s authority on bullying, Approximately 4% of teens identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or questioning (LGBTQ). These kids are more likely to be victims of bullying, sexual harassment and physical abuse and face a greater risk of social isolation. This is why school boards need to be actively supporting their students.

One former student, Alysha, says “In a world where these youth are being told to spend all their time repressing their feelings and their true identity, we need to build a community where they feel more comfortable and safe to voice their truth and fly their flag with pride.”

* The Rainbows are a symbol of hope in many cultures which is why it is so important to be raised at high schools, and public locations throughout the city and globe. This hope has been a driving force for the 2SLGBTQ+ community for decades during which they were being prosecuted and punished for something they had no control over - and something they shouldn't have to control. So It’s time to ask ourselves, why is straight love portrayed as right and pure whereas the lgbtq+ love is frowned upon and seen as the exact opposite.

Flying the flag is much more than a symbol of support. It's about letting the students know they are accepted and loved for who they are, and that they don’t have to change. Which is why I stand proudly with other students and say “There’s nothing wrong with you, there's a lot wrong with the world you live in.”

* Gabrielle D, Hajra S

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Informational “Interview”**

**Leesah Question: Why has the Catholic school board decided to not raise the flag?**

**Gabrielle:** [Halton Catholic District School Board (HCDSB)](https://globalnews.ca/tag/hcdsb/) trustees have voted against flying the Pride flag at its schools, after a lengthy discussion that was weighed down by procedural wrangling and numerous attemp

ted amendments,

The debate started after Burlington Trustee Brenda Agnew moved a motion to direct Board staff to ensure the flag was flown during Pride month in June at all schools and the Board’s headquarters.

The motion sparked debate among several trustees who raised issues such as ensuring all groups would have access to flying flags, the need to erect secondary flag poles and how chaplains and other staff can provide better support than the flag.

Burlington Trustee Vincent Iantomasi said the Board needs a formal policy on flags, adding the Canadian flag serves “*as an unmistakable symbol of unity and inclusiveness for all Canadians*.”

**Gabrielle: Question: How do HCDSB students feel about the decision to not raise the flag?**

Amber: Nicole Hotchkiss a student that attends one of the catholic schools in Halton, was put forward the motion to flying the flag and states this when they heard the negative outcome “I *am disappointed. I am repulsed by the extensive amendments made which gutted the original motion. At one point (Trustee) O’brien removed the entire motion in replacement of doing nothing at all*” (inside Halton)

This motion when brought to the attention of the student body caused a huge backlash with over “15,000 signatures” on a petition

The Catholic student senate passed a motion in support of the flag being raised

**Amber Question: Where did the teachers stand on this topic?**

Leesha: According to Inside Halton, the Halton chapter of the Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association (OECTA) sent a letter on behalf of their 3,000 members, “In support of the motion to fly the Pride flag in June.”

**Leesha Question: What are the parents saying about the decision not to fly the flag or not to post a safe space sign in each class?**

Gabrielle “*Honestly, I can’t ac*

*tually believe this is even a conversation. The fact that there is a VOTE needing to take place to show support is mind-blowing. I have two queer children and EVERY SPACE they are in or their siblings are in MUST be supportive, inclusive and affirming. Social media is an amazing vehicle for spreading information and getting support. I’m proud of our community for committing to using the online platform to spread this important message*.” - Ju

lie Cole

Looking on the website of “All Eyes are On the Catholic School Board” It is clear that many parents are in support of the flag being risen at the school and are ultimately repulsed by the final outcome

However, there were other families who vocalized NOT wanting the flag raised. According to a story in the Toronto Star, Maria Filice, who said she has two daughters who went to HCDSB schools, said when it comes to flying the Pride flag, “*it is not right to be promoting a lifestyle that is opposed to Catholic teaching.*”

**Gabrielle: Question: What impact would raising the flag make amongst 2SLGBTQ+ students?**

Halton youth black voices: Flying the pride flag symbolizes support for the 2SLGBTQ+ community. Not only does this act create a notion that our schools are a safe space for everyone, regardless of race, religion, gender, sexuality, and more, but it also sets a precedent for other school boards, showing them our unwavering support for our students and raises awareness. Having said that, the HCDSB’s refusal to fly the flag sends an opposing message. It puts into question the legitimacy of their words of support and could leave students with a sense of doubt.

**Leesha: Question: Why is the Catholic Board able to have a “Rainbow Day” but will not fly the flag?**

Amber: It appears that even in the midst of overwhelming pressure from students, parents, and Halton community members alike, the HCDSB refuses to fly the flag. At the beginning of Pride Month this year, the Catholic school board announced, through their social media accounts, that they would be “raising awareness around Pride Month” with a “HCDSB Rainbow Day”. Meaning, instead of showing a sign of visible support for students, the board believes that wearing colourful t-shirts is good enough. Countless students have expressed their disdain for this failed attempt to support the LGBTQ+ community since then, with several stating that the “Rainbow Day'' is an example of performative activism. Additionally, many view the recent posts about Pride Month made by the Catholic school board as “damage control” and an attempt to understate the harm they have caused to their students and the LGBTQ+ community.

**Amber: Question: Who can we reach out to if we need help expressing our thoughts on 2SLGBTQ+?**

Gabrielle: Guidance counsellors, trusted adults, friends and family

Local organizations that can help include: Positive Space Network and PFLAG Halton

**Leesha Question: How can we support 2SLGBTQ+ students?**

Amber: We all can let our fellow students know that we love and accept them regardless of their sexuality and gender. and no matter what the school board says about the topic the student will stand as a united front.

It is important to make the spaces we occupy safer by shutting down harmful comments and mentalities and promoting equity. Statements like “what did you mean by that” or “we don’t talk like that here” or “I’m not sure what gave you the impression you can have this sort of conversation with me” or simply “stop!” are boundary-setting statements that can help combat the culture of SILENCE.

We can listen to our 2SLGBTQ+ friends and classmates when they need to talk. We can keep an eye out for folks in our classrooms, hallways and lunch rooms who are alone or isolated and choose to sit with and include.- and mostly importantly , we can ASK each individual what is the best to support them.

**Gabrielle Question: What are some resources to help queer youth, both in and outside of the catholic school board?**

A: Positive Space Network (PSN); provides gender-affirming gear, mental health resources, spread awareness about the 2SLGBTQIA+ community and have various programs and events. [www.positivespaceNetwork.ca](http://www.positivespacenetwork.ca)

**Leesha Question: What are the negative effects on the students in the board?**

Amber: “In K-12 schools, safe spaces and trauma-informed practices help students learn to self-regulate and process negative emotions like anger and sadness. They're able to develop long-term, self-management abilities that make room for academic success as they get older.” “When we begin with inclusive K-12 classrooms, we’re able to provide our students with the tools they need to survive in a complex world.” [Advocates for Youth](http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/) states that 6 – 10% of the young people in your school may be LGBTQ. “Unless your program positively acknowledges their presence and actively affirms their rights and dignity, these young people may feel compelled to keep their sexual identity a secret. Having to keep secret such an essential part of life puts these youth at risk of negative mental and physical health outcomes.” (Jennifer Gunn, Resilient Educator). -<https://resilienteducator.com/classroom-resources/creating-safe-spaces/>

**Gabrielle Question: What can we do so that HCDSB will fly the flag next year?**

Halton youth black voices: It is clear that continued efforts to advocate for flag raising and inclusive education must happen! As more catholic boards across the province begin to fly the flags, we are hopeful that the momentum will have a positive ripple effect. It is also to remember youth and adults have a voice - we can communicate to our student trustees, write to our board and vote for the school trustees. We can continue to work and ensure that our projects and events will be heard, so that the HCDSB will fly the flag and by doing so accept the 2SLGBTQ+ community as an equal and balance the diversity of culture and representation.

**Gabrielle Question: Who can I reach out to if I need support?**

Amber Answer: The Canadian mental health association says that a positive and supportive workplace and neighbourhood is a key factor in the well-being of LGBTQIA + individuals. There are many organizations and resources individuals can access to help them feel safe and welcome. Kids Help Phone is an organization where children and youth ages 5-20 can reach out to trained counsellors. Their number is (1-800-668-6868). LGBT youthline is another great resource for people needing to talk. They are open Sunday to Friday and you can feel free to call them from 6 AM to 9 PM at 1-800-268-9688. If calling is not an option for you or if you would prefer to text, feel free to do so from 4 PM to 9: 30 PM at 647-964-4725.

* <https://ontario.cmha.ca/documents/lesbian-gay-bisexual-trans-queer-identified-people-and-mental-health/>
* <https://www.youthline.ca/>