

**Administrative Guidelines
for Student Groups in Catholic Schools**

September 17, 2012



Ontario Catholic School
Trustees' Association

Administrative Guidelines for Student Groups in Catholic Schools

The Catholic faith respects all individuals. The goal of each Catholic School is to create for all of its students a loving and positive learning environment accepting of all students and consistent with Catholic teachings.

As such, the Board considers violence, harassment and/or bullying on the basis of race, colour, ethnicity, culture, citizenship, ancestry, origin, religion, creed, family status, sexual orientation, gender identity, socio-economic status, disability and/or any ground protected by the *Human Rights Code* or any other immutable characteristic to be unacceptable. Please see also the Board's Code of Conduct, Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan, and Safe Schools Policy.

The Board supports the use of positive practices to prevent such behaviour and recognizes that student groups and activities may assist in creating a positive, loving learning environment consistent with Catholic teachings and free of bullying, harassment and violence motivated by bias, prejudice or hate and supports such groups and activities.

Students may establish "Respecting Difference" groups and are permitted by the *Education Act* to establish 'gay-straight alliances' consistent with the following objectives.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of such students groups and activities to promote a positive, loving learning environment consistent with Catholic teachings and free of bullying, harassment and bias, prejudice or hate motivated violence are as follows:

- To support and affirm the dignity of all students in all aspects of school life regardless of their immutable characteristics;
- To improve understandings of the lives of all students and find ways to increase respect for the dignity of each other in ways appropriate to the school setting;
- To clarify and give definition to appropriate terms, behaviours and actions to promote greater awareness of and responsiveness to, the deleterious effects of bullying, harassment and hate motivated violence;
- To promote timely and effective responses to prevent and respond to bullying, harassment and hate motivated violence to ensure the maximization of safety for all pupils;
- To provide education for all students consistent with the Catholic faith with respect to bullying, harassment and hate motivated violence prevention in schools;
- To provide resources consistent with the Catholic faith to support pupils who are impacted by bullying, harassment and hate motivated violence;
- To provide opportunities for pastoral and spiritual guidance for young people;
- To encourage students to report incidents of bullying, harassment and bias, prejudice or hate motivated violence safely in a manner that minimizes the possibility of reprisal or breach of

confidentiality and is consistent with best practices in relation to counselling and/or Chaplaincy involvement;

PRINCIPLES

All student groups and activities to support positive, loving learning environments consistent with Catholic teachings and free of bullying, harassment and bias, prejudice or hate motivated violence shall comply with the following principles:

- **All activities and groups shall be opened to all students who wish to participate in an appropriate manner;**
- **The activities and groups must be respectful of and consistent with Catholic teachings;**
- **All mentors and supervisors of student groups and activities must know and be committed to Catholic teachings; and**
- **All outside speakers invited to speak to a group or to provide a school activity must respect Catholic teachings.**

PROCEDURE FOR APPROVAL OF A STUDENT GROUP OR ACTIVITY

1. One or more students who desire to establish a student group or to organize a specific student activity must submit a written proposal in the form attached as Appendix A for the review and consideration of the principal. The nature, purpose and mandate of the student initiated group or activity shall be clearly articulated.
2. The principal, in consultation with other school staff, as appropriate, shall review and consider the written proposal with respect to the following:
 - a. The purpose and goal(s) of the activity or group;
 - b. The allocation of student supervision, school space, and other resources needed; and
 - c. Whether or not the proposal is consistent with the principles identified in this procedure.
3. The principal is responsible for ensuring that each approved student group and activity is supervised and supported.
4. Prior to an initial meeting of the student group, the principal shall:
 - a. Carefully consider which staff volunteer is most appropriate to supervise and support the group and its activities. The staff advisor must be an individual who is knowledgeable about and committed to Catholic teaching;
 - b. Invite the Chaplaincy leader to participate in group meetings whenever possible;

- c. Clarify the objectives of the group with the staff advisor and provide any necessary in-service:
 - i. See: Pastoral Guidelines to Assist Students of Same-Sex Orientation (2004) and the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops statement, “Pastoral Ministry to Young People with Same-Sex Attraction” (2011).
5. The principal must ensure that vulnerable students have access to support from Social Workers, Child and Youth Workers, and/or Chaplaincy staff members, where deemed necessary by the principal or staff advisor.
6. The principal must ensure that student groups and activities are not used for protest against or advocacy for anything that is not in accord with the Catholic faith foundation of the school.
7. All materials for group use must be reviewed and approved by the staff advisor and all materials for school/community awareness must be reviewed and approved by the staff supervisor and administration.
8. All students involved must agree to respect the personal privacy of student participants. Restrictions shall be placed on the use of personal electronic devices during meetings, posting personal information on social media sites or disclosure of personal information in any other manner. Failure to comply may result in the suspension of the group and/or one or more group members.
9. The staff advisor must be present for each meeting in its entirety.
10. If a matter arises that requires the involvement and/or intervention of outside agencies (such as, Children’s Aid, Children/Youth Mental Health, or law enforcement) these services should be sought at the earliest opportunity. Please refer to the Board’s procedures regarding Reporting a Child in Need of Protection and Police Protocol.
11. The principal shall recommend that groups established under these guidelines be named “Respecting Difference” groups; however, when requested by one or more students, the principal shall permit, in accordance with the *Education Act*, the group to be named ‘gay-straight alliance’ or by another similar name.

Appendix A

Student Group and/or Activity Proposal

Student Name _____

Student Grade _____

Request for Student Group

Please identify the nature of the group, its purpose and objectives:

Please identify the estimated number of participants: _____

Please identify the frequency with which the group wishes to meet: weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, or once each semester.

Please identify the nature of the meetings:

Please provide any other information that would assist the principal to make a decision regarding whether or not to permit the student group:

Request for Student Activity

Please identify the nature of the activity, its purpose and objectives (i.e. external speaker; mentorship; fundraising; awareness campaign):

Please identify the estimated number of student organizers: _____

Please identify the estimated number of student participants (whole school; particular grade:

Please identify the frequency of the activity: (once; once each semester etc.:

Please provide any other information that would assist the principal to make a decision regarding whether or not to permit the student activity:
