



Ontario Catholic School
Trustees' Association

“RESPECTING DIFFERENCE”

A RESOURCE FOR CATHOLIC SCHOOLS IN THE PROVINCE OF ONTARIO

**Regarding the Establishment and Running of Activities or Organizations Promoting
Equity and Respect for All Students**

January 25, 2012



Ontario Catholic School
Trustees' Association

OUR MISSION

Inspired by the Gospel, we provide leadership, service and a provincial voice for Catholic School Boards in promoting and protecting Catholic education.

OUR VISION

In keeping with our Mission, the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association:

OPERATIONAL VALUES

- ✦ **Embodies** and promotes the values and traditions of our Catholic faith in all Association activities.
- ✦ **Respects** the principles of democratic and accountable governance.

POLITICAL ADVOCACY

- ✦ **Protects** the constitutional right of the Catholic community to govern, control and manage Catholic schools.
- ✦ **Promotes** education in our province that reflects the Catholic principles of social justice.
- ✦ **Advocates** for government recognition of the distinctive nature of Catholic education.
- ✦ **Advocates** for provincial policy, legislation and funding support that enable Catholic boards to provide quality Catholic education.
- ✦ **Influences** the strategic and political direction of the Ontario government and opposition parties regarding issues that impact Catholic education.

INFORMATION & SERVICES

- ✦ **Provides** faith formation and professional development resources and opportunities for its members.
- ✦ **Provides** to member boards information and services that recognize their diverse circumstances and needs.

COMMUNICATIONS & PUBLIC RELATIONS

- ✦ **Develops** effective structures that enhance communication and working relationships among OCSTA and its member boards.
- ✦ **Communicates** with member Boards and Catholic partners regarding relevant educational issues and OCSTA activities.
- ✦ **Promotes** public understanding of and support for Catholic education.
- ✦ **Celebrates** and **highlights** Catholic education's significant and continuing contribution to Ontario society.

PARTNERSHIPS

- ✦ **Stimulates** ongoing visioning of how Catholic education partners can collaborate to serve the interests of Catholic education.
- ✦ **Builds** significant partnerships within and beyond the Catholic community in support of Catholic education.

Contents

Overview	1
The Gospel Context: Against Bullying.....	1
 Background to the Present Concerns regarding Equity, Diversity and Anti-Bullying	4
 The Development of Equity and Inclusion Policies with respect to Catholic Education	4
 Respecting Difference: The Meaning of “Difference”	5
 Various Expressions of Bullying	6
 The Catholic Church’s Teaching Regarding Sexuality	7
The Catholic Faith Rejects Injustice and Affirms Human Dignity	7
The Catholic Church and Morality	8
The Catholic Church and Sexuality	8
 Administrative Guidelines for Anti-Bullying Activities and “Respecting Difference”	
Groups in Catholic Schools	9
Objectives	9
Administrative Strategies	10
General Procedures for “Respecting Difference” Groups or Activities in Catholic Schools	10
Administrative Procedures for “Respecting Difference” Groups or Activities in Catholic	
Schools	10
Guidelines for “Respecting Difference” Groups	11

“RESPECTING DIFFERENCE”

A RESOURCE FOR CATHOLIC SCHOOLS IN THE PROVINCE OF ONTARIO

Regarding the Establishment and Running of Activities or Organizations Promoting Equity and Respect for All Students

Overview

The entire aim of a Catholic School is to create a loving and positive learning environment consistent with Catholic teaching. Student activities and leadership can play an important role in making this happen (mindful of the caveats set out in this document regarding what matters are appropriate and inappropriate for group discussion).

The Catholic religion respects all people. Individuals who are dealing with same sex attraction or issues of gender identity are treated with sensitivity, respect and compassion. The Catholic faith supports affording students the opportunity to exercise leadership in dealing with social issues in the school. It is certainly very appropriate for students to take the lead in identifying the need for initiatives that address concerns related to the life of the whole school community and are in harmony with the faith foundation of a Catholic school.

This document consists of information that provides a thematic overview, followed by some practical and more specific administrative guidelines for the establishment of “Respecting Difference” student-led organizations and activities in Catholic schools. The impetus for this Resource is related to implementation of Boards’ equity and inclusive education policies as well as recent legislative initiatives that deal with bullying (still in process at the time of this writing)¹. Groups formed to address the care and safety needs of students dealing with issues related to gender identity or same-sex attraction will be supported by school administration.²

To ensure that all members of Catholic school communities work together in an atmosphere of safety and respect for the dignity of one another regardless of race, colour, ancestry, place of origin, citizenship, ethnic origin, disability, creed (includes religion), sex, sexual orientation, age, family status and marital status, Catholic school boards will adopt administrative guidelines, strategies, and policies that promote respect for human rights, support diversity, combat discrimination and respect religious beliefs and accommodation in relation to student-led activities or organizations.³

The Gospel Context: Against Bullying

Increasingly in our culture and in our times, the issue of bullying in its many manifestations has become a great concern for parents, for teachers and for all those

¹ Bill 13, *An Act to Amend the Education Act with respect to bullying and other matters*, received first reading on November 30, 2011.

² While there will be groups established to address the care and safety needs of students dealing with issues related to gender identity or same-sex attraction, GSA clubs, per se, are not acceptable in Catholic schools for the following reason: externally developed programs (such as GSAs) do not meet all of the objectives and administrative procedural concerns for “Respecting Difference” groups (as stated in this document).

³ See *Ontario Human Rights Code* and Policy and Program Memorandum (“PPM”) No. 119 (at p. 4)

involved in the education of our young. Students are being victimized, shunned, harmed and need to be helped. This is a matter of concern for students, both those who themselves experience bullying and those who see their fellow students being mistreated. It is also a concern for parents and for teachers and all involved with the school community.

The Catholic school community, like all school communities, has an obligation to ensure a safe environment for all students by vigilant and steadfast efforts to eradicate all forms of bullying as well as to provide personal and pastoral care for every individual whose worth as a child of God has been attacked by acts of bullying. The Catholic school must continue to be a safe, inclusive community for all young people entrusted to our care.

In the Gospel bearing his name, Luke the Evangelist relates the story of the good Samaritan, (Luke 10:25-37). Jesus in response to the question “Who is my neighbour?”, tells a parable about a traveller who is beaten, robbed, and left to die on the road to Jericho.

Some who came across this victim of violence passed by on the other side of the road. It was a Samaritan, coming upon the traveller, who was moved with compassion. He did not ask whether the victim had brought the violence upon himself, or if he was good and therefore worthy of being helped. He invested his resources and more importantly, his time, to care for this wounded person. When he had done all that he could do, he asked the innkeeper to continue caring for the person until his return

Following this example, we need not only to discipline but also to extend pastoral care to those who bully, exploit or demean others so that they may turn away from a behaviour which is not only destructive to their victims, but which also frequently masks or reflects serious problems in their own lives.

Although the gospel context and the activities discussed throughout this Resource apply to situations where students experience bullying for any reason, initiatives appropriate in the case of five particular categories (gender, race, disability and sexual orientation/ same-sex and other-sex attractions and sexual identity) are noted specifically – hence the term “Respecting Difference” which addresses all forms of bullying.

These initiatives are but one dimension of the whole effort to provide a safe and accepting learning environment which enhances the many existing ways in which Catholic schools provide pastoral care for students according to the principles of the Gospel. Paramount to the success of this process is the adequate training of all school personnel, teachers in particular, regarding all aspects of this effort to eliminate bullying.

This Resource is intended to be both of general and specific assistance to all Catholic Schools in Ontario (English and French language) and to supplement and/or replace (where there are any conflicts) existing Equity and Diversity and/or Anti-Bullying initiatives already in place.⁴

⁴ In addition, Policy/Program (PPM) No. 144 “Bullying Prevention and Intervention” (October 19, 2009) as well as certain existing Policies and Guidelines from various districts have been reviewed and, in what follows, various principles and, in some cases, exact language, has been taken from these. For the sake of consistency and clarity, it is intended that these Guidelines are to be the primary point of reference for all schools on the subject matter they cover. It is assumed that Boards have already consulted the relevant PPM’s and additional materials such as those produced by the Ontario Education Services Corporation for specific Guidance on such areas as the “Student Discipline Policy” Template (April 2010) and the “Student Discipline Procedures Template” (April 2010). Care

“Respecting Difference” is an aspect of the broader concerns, widely recognized in and by the Province, of the need to respect diversity, human rights and multiculturalism.⁵

Parents are the primary educators of their children⁶ and may choose to delegate this authority to the educational systems that are available in Ontario. These include various forms of education; religious, non-religious, public or private, classroom or home, whether publicly or privately funded. All these forms are accepted and encouraged in Ontario. This broad general framework, providing as it does a variety of choices for parents as to the sort of education they wish for their children, is itself a model for respecting difference and should be understood as such.

Some forms of education are based on distinct religious beliefs. Respect for a variety of beliefs is an aspect of the fundamental freedoms of conscience and religion in Section 2(a), equality in Section 15 and multiculturalism and pluralism in Section 27 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The provision of a variety of religious and non-religious faith-based schools is further evidence of diversity in fact, and not just in theory. Respect for difference in the form and substance of education is, therefore, already recognized in the varied forms that exist and such variety exemplifies the diversity which this Resource and the Ministry of Education itself have recognized.

Recent concern regarding bullying and its highly detrimental effects on pupils is shared by the Catholic education system. The Catholic education system rejects bullying in all its forms and stands firmly for the respect due to all persons.

Catholic education notes that recent initiatives focus upon:

- a) the promotion of equity and fair treatment related to gender and anti-racism;
- b) the promotion of awareness and understanding and respect for people with disabilities and people of all sexual attractions and gender identities, and;
- c) the establishment of activities and organizations in relation to these initiatives (subject to the qualifications set out in these Guidelines) so as to reduce bullying and make schools safer for pupils.

This Resource addresses an even wider context: that of ensuring that Catholic Schools provide an environment in which all students feel safe from bullying. All students who are victims of bullying must be cared for and that context, against the backdrop of respecting diversity, provides the framework for this Resource.

should be taken in consulting other sources that such things as terminology used there be consistent with the comments contained in this Resource.

⁵ See, for example, Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy (2009) p.7 and Equity and Inclusive Education Guidelines (2009) “Alternative Policy Statement for Catholic District School Boards” pp. 55 and 61; and PPM No. 119 (as amended; June 24, 2009) at p. 9 (and respecting the context of denominational rights of Roman Catholic schools, p.3).

⁶ *R. v. Audelet* [1996] 2 S.C.R. 171 per Justice L Forest “In my view, no evidence is required to prove that teachers play a key role in our society that places them in a direct position of trust and authority towards their students. Parents delegate their parental authority to teachers and entrust them with the responsibility of instilling in their children a large part of the store of learning they will acquire during their development.”

Background to the Present Concerns regarding Equity, Diversity and Anti-Bullying

For some years the provincial government, educators, various members of the community and associations, including Roman Catholic education authorities and the Roman Catholic Bishops, have been involved in efforts to promote equity and diversity and to expressly reject bullying in schools.

The Catholic Community has supported these government initiatives because they seemed just and important and because they respected the difference and integrity of the Catholic system. In short, “difference” (as discussed in this Resource) has been recognized and affirmed. In the *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* (2009), (“the Strategy”) for example, efforts by school boards, including Catholic district school boards, to promote equity-related work, were noted (p.p. 15-17).

The process anticipated for advancing equity and diversity recognized that the principles should “...reflect the diversity of the broader community” (at p. 21). Fundamentally, the “legislative and political context” recognized that “the strategy is to be implemented within the context of the *Education Act*, which affirms the constitutional rights of Catholic and French-Language Rights Holders in Ontario.” (p.13).

Based upon this, the equity and inclusive education *Guidelines for Policy Development and Implementation* (2009), (“the Guidelines”) also recognized that “for Roman Catholic and French-Language Boards, development and implementation of equity and inclusive education policies will take place within the context of the denominational rights of Roman Catholic schools as set out in Section 93 of the *Constitution Act, 1867* and the *Education Act*, and the language rights of French-Language Rights Holders as set out in Section 23 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* in the *Education Act*” (at p. 8).

The Development of Equity and Inclusion Policies with respect to Catholic Education

Catholic education has cooperated with and developed within its own understanding, program guidelines and policies that respect human rights, diversity and multiculturalism. The Ontario government’s *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* document referenced the Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops’ (as it was then called) observation that the suicide rates among those who identified as homosexual students are higher than among their heterosexual peers. The Bishops’ Conference also called for positive action reinforcing its earlier statement from 2004 that: “the right of each student to be free of harassment, violence or malice in speech or action is unequivocal and schools carry the clear obligation to provide a positive school environment for all students and staff” (*Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy*, pg. 7).

Clearly, respect for students can be pursued from within a distinctively Catholic perspective. It is that pursuit and perspective that we seek to further in the Guidelines that follow.⁷

⁷ The “Guidelines” contained at p. 55, an “Alternative Policy Statement for Catholic District School Boards” that policy statement reads as follows:

“a. Policy Statement:

The Catholic School Board recognizes that all people are created in the image and likeness of God, and as such deserve to be treated within dignity, respect and fairness. The Board

Respecting Difference: The Meaning of “Difference”

A great deal of the current discussion around bullying and respect centres on the politics of identity and this, sometimes, in relation to sexual identity. Students in schools are not immune to the pressures of the social currents that often seek to focus more on sexual identity than any questions relating to sexual morality and the formation of the whole person. Because, in our society, citizens for the most part do not and will not all agree (with few exceptions) about what sexual acts are moral and immoral, it is important that, in all topics related to the politics of sexuality, understanding of and respect for “difference” be discussed against a clear moral background. Because of the interest in the politics of sexuality in our time it is not surprising, therefore, that a discussion around “bullying” seems to focus a great deal of its energy on bullying in relation to sexual identity. Such a focus, however, should not deflect us from viewing the root causes of bullying in relation to its general and deeper causes; they are much wider than merely issues related to sexuality.

Often disputes and disagreements about difference underlie fears of rejection, lack of acceptance, lack of support and lack of affirmation. Properly understood, difference is something to be recognized in a society that honours diversity, multiculturalism and human rights. Respecting difference does not mean insisting that another person share our views. Being “tolerant” of another person does not mean accepting that what he or she says is correct or immune from moral evaluation and criticism. This is so with respect to many things we hold to be important.

Beliefs across a whole number of areas, including religion and cultural practices and more personal matters such as acceptable sexual conduct, will differ and these different beliefs are an aspect of living in a multicultural and pluralistic society that honours human rights and diversity. While it is an all too human temptation to insist that others share our beliefs and to eradicate the frameworks that make a variety of choices possible, forced acceptance of beliefs about which we may differ is not the hallmark of a free and democratic society but rather its opposite.

This Resource is based upon the need to recognize that it is possible to respect, affirm and support the dignity of another person while at the same time disagreeing with their viewpoint on sexual morality. This understanding is important in society generally but with respect to differences based upon conscience and religious beliefs, it is essential to restate the importance of respect for differences at this time.

Courteous expressions of difference, set out in a context that explains the nature of difference and respect for others’ viewpoints (rather than agreement with them), is all part of mature reflection on matters where there may be sometimes strenuous disagreement and strong

and its staff are committed to the elimination of discrimination as outlined in Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy and PPM No. 119, “Developing and Implementing Equity and Inclusive Education Policies in Ontario Schools” (June 24, 2009). The Board recognizes that its School system gives pre-eminence to the tenets of the Catholic faith, consistent with the *Constitution Act, 1867*, section 93, and the protections afforded in the *Ontario Human Rights Code*.

With the context of the Catholic school system, the Board is committed to promoting the values of respect, dignity, and fairness for all. Our schools will maintain a learning and working environment in which differences are recognized and respected.

It is the policy of the Catholic School Board to provide in all its operations an educational environment that promotes and supports diversity as well as the equal attainment of life opportunities for all students, staff, parents and community members. The Board will not allow discrimination or any expression thereof by any members of the school community.”

concerns about identity. The Catholic faith has a particular viewpoint about the whole human person and the person in relation to others in community. The holistic view of the human person and the understanding of what constitutes the "common good" may be difficult to explain to others outside a Catholic context, but part of the respect owed to Catholics is that those outside try to understand it or at least stand in a position of respectful disagreement with it.

Various Expressions of Bullying

People are bullied for many reasons—none of which are justified. Individuals may be bullied, for example, because of their poor social skills, because of weight or physical appearance, because they lack skills in sports or academics, because of nationality, because of perceived sexual orientation, because of race or religion, or even because of a physical disability or illness. There are many things that can lead to a young person suffering the torment of being bullied. We need to care equally for all who suffer at the hands of bullies. In a Catholic school we recognize and accept each and every student as a child of God who is to be treated with respect and love. Whatever excuse triggers the actions of the bully, all bullying is wrong and needs to be dealt with by the entire community.

Bullies use their physical size, strength or status and support within their peer group to intentionally hurt or cause discomfort to another. Bullying can express itself physically, verbally or socially.

Form	Description	Examples
Cyber -bullying	When a person is harassed or intimidated through use of technology such as computer or mobile phones	Social media (facebook, twitter or other social-networking sites, emails or sms texting) are used to pass malicious gossip, hurtful innuendo or racist, sexist or other slurs against a person to shun, harass, demean, intimidate, threaten or otherwise harm a person.
Physical	When a person is harmed or damage is done to their property	Slapping, hitting, pinching, kicking, locking in a confined space, unwelcome touching, vandalism, theft, extortion or threats.
Verbal	When a person is victimized through hurtful words and gestures	Slurs, insults and name calling, unwelcome teasing, taunting, spreading gossip or rumours, racial or sexually derogatory comments.

Social	When a person is shunned or excluded from groups or events	Insulting graffiti, threatening notes, letters, e-mails, telephone calls, intimidation using threats, confrontations and weapons, shunning, (the systematic exclusion from normal conversation, etc.)
--------	--	---

When a school community stands united against all forms of bullying, the bully fails to secure the enablement that generally feeds the aggressive behaviour that, in turn, selectively preys on those who have been identified as most vulnerable or easiest to marginalize within the group. Bullying of any kind does not build community. It attacks a person’s dignity, and by extension exploits and destroys community. Bullying is enabled by silence and by looking the other way.⁸

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, as referenced at the beginning of this document, we are told of two passers-by who ignore the seriously wounded traveller by crossing to the other side of the road so as to avoid an encounter with him. This reminds us of the “bystanders” who witness bullying, or who are aware of its effects, and do nothing. The Gospel calls us to respond to others, especially those in need, and as students and staff in a Catholic school, we ought not to turn our backs on those who suffer bullying in any form and for any reason. Those who report bullying must be accorded all protections so that they themselves are not threatened for exposing what is unjust and inappropriate.

The Catholic Church’s Teaching Regarding Sexuality

The following section attempts to clarify the Church’s official position on sexual morality, especially as it pertains to same-sex attraction.

The Catholic Faith Rejects Injustice and Affirms Human Dignity

The Roman Catholic faith views all people as children of God. Thus, respect is due to everyone irrespective of their race, gender, age, stage of development, disability, sexual orientation (same-sex or opposite-sex attraction), gender identity, class or religion. The Catholic faith stands resolutely against injustice including injustice in interpersonal relationships such as those typified by bullying. The scourge of bullying in education and in society must be resisted in Catholic schools who see bullying as completely unacceptable.

Catholics ought to be exemplary in treating persons with homosexual inclinations first and foremost as human beings created by God and worthy of respect. The Church’s teaching emphasizes this attitude: “It is deplorable that homosexual persons have been and are the object of violent malice in speech or in action. Such treatment deserves condemnation from the Church’s pastors wherever it occurs. It reveals a kind of disregard for others which endangers the most

⁸ In PPM 144 at p. 2 “Bullying” is defined as: ...a form of repeated, persistent, and aggressive behaviour directed at an individual or individuals that is intended to cause (or should be known to cause) fear and distress and/or harm to another person’s body, feelings, self-esteem, or reputation. Bullying occurs in a context where there is a real or perceived power imbalance.”

fundamental principles of a healthy society. The intrinsic dignity of each person must always be respected in word, in action and in law.”⁹

The Catholic Church and Morality

The primary teaching document of the Catholic Church is the Catechism of the Catholic Church. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) is essentially a guide for how to live as a good Catholic. It is to this resource that we should turn whenever we are seeking guidance on any particular issue, although we should always remember that the Catechism is an authoritative précis, not a complete exposition, of Catholic teaching. There are sections in the catechism that pertain to what Catholics should believe (Part 1: Profession of Faith), how we should worship (Part 2: Celebration of the Christian Mystery), how we should act (Part 3: Life in Christ), and how we should pray (Part 4: Christian Prayer). The topic of homosexuality is found in Part 3: Life in Christ. This is the section of the catechism that concerns morality. The Church’s teaching on homosexuality is an extension of its teaching on human sexuality in general. In order to more fully appreciate the topic of homosexuality, it is necessary to situate the discussion within the broader context of the meaning and purpose of human sexuality.

The Catholic Church and Sexuality

The Church invites every person to develop the virtue of chastity. All people, whatever their sexuality, single and/or married, are called to live a life of chastity, and that involves for each person a growth in holiness, and an inner peace that is made evident in a truly joyful life of generous love for others. All actions involving human sexuality are morally assessed in reference to its two-fold meaning and purpose, mutual love of the spouses and an openness to life. If a person acts in a way that goes against this meaning it is also viewed as an act against the virtue of chastity. This assessment is the same for all people, whether heterosexual or those with same-sex attraction.

⁹ See Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the pastoral care of homosexual persons (1986), n.10. Referred to in *Pastoral Ministry to young people with same-sex attraction*, Episcopal Commission for Doctrine of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011 p.5.

Administrative Guidelines for Anti-Bullying Activities and “Respecting Difference” Groups in Catholic Schools

This “Respecting Difference Resource” has been developed for students and employees to ensure compliance with provincial legislation, guidelines, policies and procedures as well as in recognition of fundamental rights and freedoms including those set out in the *Constitution Act, 1867*, and the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Constitution Act, 1982*.

Objectives

The Guidelines have been developed to assist Catholic school boards to:

- a. Support and affirm the dignity of all students and employees in all aspects of school life irrespective of their membership in any of the categories set out in the rationale above;
- b. 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;
- c. Clarify and give definition to appropriate terms, behaviours and actions to promote greater awareness of and responsiveness to, the deleterious effects of bullying;
- d. Promote timely and effective rules and procedures against bullying to ensure the maximization of safety for all pupils;
- e. Provide training consistent with the Catholic faith for all teachers and other staff with respect to bullying prevention and intervention in schools;
- f. Provide resources consistent with the Catholic faith to support pupils who are impacted by bullying;
- g. Provide personal, one-on-one opportunities for pastoral and spiritual guidance for young people (in addition to any group activities);
- h. Provide resources to pupils who have been suspended or expelled for bullying as part of programs described in the *Education Act*, Section 312;
- i. Provide procedures that allow pupils to report incidents of bullying safely and in a way that minimizes the possibility of reprisal or breach of confidentiality and that conforms to best practices in relation to counselling and/or chaplaincy involvement;
- j. Provide effective procedures to respond to complaints of bullying and support pupils in schools who wish to establish and lead activities or organizations that promote, among other things, gender equity, anti-racism, understanding of and respect for all people irrespective of their disability, sexual orientation¹⁰, or gender identity;
- k. Promote “Respecting Difference” activities or organizations in relation to the foregoing and ensure appropriate school supervision and consistency with principles of the Catholic faith.

¹⁰ In these Guidelines “sexual orientation” includes both same-sex and opposite-sex attractions.

Administrative Strategies

Education, Staff and Professional Development

- (a) Boards are encouraged to provide and promote opportunities for staff to increase their awareness and understanding of the scope and impact of discrimination and of bullying against any person.
- (b) Boards are encouraged to provide and promote opportunities for staff to increase their knowledge and skills in promoting respect for human rights, respecting diversity, understanding difference in relation to the Catholic faith and the surrounding society and addressing discrimination in schools.

Student Activities or Organizations

Students may, in accordance with local board policies, request the establishment of activities or organizations within the school that may address concerns regarding bullying.

General Procedures for “Respecting Difference” Groups or Activities in Schools:

- i. All activities and organizations should be opened to all students who wish to participate;
- ii. The activities and organization of all groups or organizations formed within Catholic schools must be respectful of and consistent with Catholic teaching;
- iii. All mentors appointed to work with groups of students must know and be committed to Catholic teachings;
- iv. Any outside speakers must be respectful of Catholic teaching.

Administrative Procedures for “Respecting Difference” Groups or Activities in Catholic Schools:

Whether to promote gender equity, to promote anti-racism, or to promote awareness and understanding of disabilities or sexual orientation/ same-sex or opposite-sex attraction or gender identity, the following administrative procedures are appropriate:

1. A student submits to the principal a written proposal for the establishment of a Respecting Difference group;
2. The principal, in consultation with other school staff, as appropriate, reviews expectations/resources¹¹ and approves request or amends same if necessary. The nature, purpose and mandate of the student initiated activity and or organization will be clearly articulated;

¹¹ Resource assessment is particularly important due to the extra-curricular nature of such student-led groups.

3. The principal is responsible for ensuring that each student group or activity is monitored/supported;
4. Prior to an initial meeting, the principal shall:
 - i. Carefully consider selection of staff advisor to monitor and support the group. The staff advisor must be an individual who is knowledgeable about and committed to Catholic teaching.;
 - ii. Invite the chaplaincy leader to participate in group meetings, where possible;
 - iii. Clarify the objectives of the group with the staff advisor before meeting with students: See relevant normative policy guidelines including, but not limited to, the 2004 document Pastoral Guidelines to Assist Students of Same-Sex Orientation and the 2011 CCCB statement by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops “Pastoral Ministry to Young People with Same-Sex Attraction”.
 - iv. Provide In-Service for staff advisor(s) regarding the purpose of the student group and how the group can be supported;
5. Inappropriate Issues for Open Forum Discussion:
 - a. Issues of gender identity, like those of sexual attraction, can be complex, delicate and highly personal. Pupils wrestling with such questions may well be in vulnerable psychological or spiritual conditions and may be exposed to unhelpful group pressure. For this reason such matters are best dealt with privately and confidentially with proper counselling and chaplaincy staff. “Peer counselling” in such a forum as a student-led group is inappropriate for such a dialogue and could, in fact, put students at risk. Confidentiality and respect limit what can properly be discussed in a group setting and supervisors should limit discussions of this sort.
 - b. Student Activities or Organizations are not intended as fora for activism, protest or advocacy of anything that is not in accord with the Catholic faith foundation of the school.

Guidelines for “Respecting Difference” Groups

1. All materials whether for group use or for school/community awareness must be reviewed and approved by the staff advisor and administration.
2. All students involved in a Respecting Difference group must agree to strict privacy guidelines including restrictions of all personal electronic devices during meetings, posting on social media sites or breaking of confidentiality of any discussion held in meetings. Failure to do so may result in the suspension of any such group and/or group member.
3. The staff advisor must be present for all meetings from beginning to end;

4. Respecting Difference groups in Catholic schools will be characterized by care, nurture of the dignity of the person, sensitive listening, the involvement of appropriate adult guidance with respect to the creation of a safe, encouraging and positive environment of fellowship in the school mindful of what matters should be discussed privately and with qualified staff.
5. When, in relation to conversations with school authorities matters arise that call for the involvement and perhaps intervention of outside agencies (such as, Children’s Aid or local law enforcement such as the Police) these should be brought in and all in the school should know that bullying will be treated as a matter requiring the utmost concern and careful handling by competent authorities.
6. It is recommended that groups established under these guidelines be named “Respecting Difference” groups.

January 25, 2012