

Thank you for providing this opportunity to present to the Board on such short notice.

Article 26.2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "education shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups," I feel, however, that adoption of draft policy 5.45 could contravene this right and create an environment of discrimination and intolerance. The declaration goes further and in Article 26.3 states that parents have the "right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children." Adoption of draft policy 5.45 could violate this right thus affecting the inviolable parent-child relationship.

As I have not received any background information and other requested documentation on the draft policy and due to the time limit I will only outline some of the more alarming points arising from the draft policy.

The writers of this draft policy have made a fundamental error. They have attempted to eliminate discrimination against one group but in doing so, they have simply displaced the discrimination from one group onto other groups. The draft policy labels education in human sexuality that is in conformity with moral convictions as "dangerous to communities and individuals." This sets an offensive tone which is unacceptable from a public education authority. Against this backdrop, the draft policy imposes on children the idea that their family is "perpetuating negative stereotypes" when parents educate their children in values that are consistent with their moral beliefs. Education authorities must not undermine parents and should not compel children to believe that their parents are a negative influence. No parent or child should be forced to submit to a curriculum which is intended to turn children against parents. Parents are the primary educators of their children. Parents grant the education system the privilege to teach their children but they do NOT relinquish their parental rights when they send their children to school. If a parent says that the school must not interfere with moral teachings, the school must respect this request. Furthermore, the committee has failed to recognize that the divine meaning of human sexuality is an integral teaching of the world's great faiths. It is discriminatory to mandate that children attending public schools adopt only one teaching to the exclusion of all others. Not only does it violate the separation of church and state but it is also violates the charter protected right of each individual to follow their chosen belief. The most alarming aspect of this draft policy, however, is that it appears to use our children as pawns to promote a particular social agenda. Using a child in this way is a violation of a child's dignity. A child is not a means to an end and must never be used in this way.

We must also consider the harm that adoption of this draft policy will inflict on families and children in our public schools that have already experienced unimaginable discrimination in countries where personal rights and freedoms are not protected. Some of these parents and children came to Canada after, at times, risking their lives to allow their children to grow up in an environment free of discrimination. I personally know many people who suffered because of their religious affiliation or because they would not submit to government indoctrination. These families could be deeply traumatized by new Canadian policies that impact their parental rights and religious freedoms. The Board must ensure that it never implements policies which could cause discrimination, intolerance, fear and pain against those who have already suffered so much.

The arguments I have outlined are based solely on my reading of draft policy 5.45. Unfortunately, this is the only relevant document that I have received to date. One area of substantial concern is that we have no knowledge of the potential penalties that could be imposed on children or families should draft policy 5.45 be implemented. Could children be expelled if they adhere to their religious beliefs? Could parents be prosecuted if they assert their parental rights? This is why I have submitted a Freedom of Information request for all documents pertaining to draft policy 5.45 so that I may understand all the potential implications. It would be wrong to implement a policy when the families of children attending Burnaby Public Schools have not been given pertinent documents nor sufficient time to examine and understand the policy. Policies that can so negatively affect the rights and freedoms of students cannot be approved and passed without open and public consultations. The Board has an obligation of accountability to all its stakeholders. It must organize and advertise public consultations and work with all concerned members of our diverse community, such as the BC Muslim Association, which on April 7th, 2011 issued a statement regarding this draft policy and, I understand, they and others are waiting for in-depth discussions and consultations. I encourage the Board to post on a public website all background information related to this draft policy and to resist all attempts to be used as a vehicle to promote the special interests of any group. The Board needs to affirm the rights of everyone to study and work in an environment free of discrimination and fear.

Should the Board adopt the draft policy, the emerging reality that I see is an education system where the rich can protect their rights and freedoms by sending their children to an independent school or choosing home schooling while the poor will have to compromise their rights in the public system. Families should not have to face economic hardship to avoid infringement on their rights. Public authorities must ensure that public subsidies are so allocated that parents are truly free to exercise their right to choose schools which are in keeping with their moral convictions and remove all economic burdens which may limit the exercise of this freedom. Would this Board then support a voucher system that would empower families to educate their children free of discrimination?

I strongly urge you to reject this draft policy and to commence open and public consultations that include representatives from all parts of our diverse community and together develop a new policy that truly accepts inclusivity and acceptance of all children and families.

Thank you for your time and consideration.