

INTRODUCTION

Our Vision of a Safe Catholic Community

Catholic schools accept the challenge of the Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops in the sacred task of “developing schools into communities of faith in which the requirement of good citizenship will be learned in a vital way from the perspective of the message of the Gospel and the teachings of the Church.”¹ It is our shared task to cultivate the virtues and social skills necessary for a life of compassionate service in building God’s reign on earth. In the words of Pope John Paul II:

To work for peace is the concern of all individuals and of all people. And because everyone is endowed with a heart and with reason and has been made in the image of God, he or she is capable of the effort of truth and sincerity which strengthens peace.²

In our efforts to follow the example of Jesus, we admit that we frequently fall short of the ideal. In order to mature in faith all persons from time to time need correction, guidance, mercy and forgiveness. The Ontario Institute of Catholic Education reminds us that:

This worldview recognizes that the divine is at work in all that surrounds us, and attention to this sacred order is critical to the Catholic ethos. Hence, a Roman Catholic vision understands that humanity is created in the image of God, created with dignity and freedom, and yet capable of choosing contrary to God’s design. And so, celebration of life is balanced by recognition of human sinfulness and the need for forgiveness.³

On a Human Journey Together

Central to our vision of a safe, caring, inclusive and healthy school community is our recognition that the person of the Risen Christ is the human face of God sharing our life in order to heal us of our brokenness and liberate us from sin.⁴ Throughout the gospels we find Jesus identifying with those who are on the margins, those who do not easily fit into society’s mould. The Catholic school community is to be the face of Christ for those who struggle with, or are negatively impacted by, those behaviours or attitudes that we commonly associate with misconduct. Thus, a Catholic community must approach misconduct with reverence for the sacred and irreplaceable value of each person, created in God’s image. This is particularly true for our student population who are still progressing along a developmental continuum and need the guidance of adults who provide them with valuable role models.

Catholic educators hold out hope for the student who tests the limits and breaks the rules. We recognize that reaching full Christian maturity is a long and arduous process. Many young people today are dealing with enormous negative influences that may seriously impair their judgment and limit their ability to control behaviours. Thus, we are committed to providing on-going support for those students who struggle with challenging behaviours, counting on their latent giftedness, and on God’s grace to transform. We seriously embrace the gospel imperative that the lost and broken members must occupy a special place at the heart of the believing Christian community.⁵ Safe, caring, inclusive and healthy Dufferin-Peel communities are characterized by adult leaders who model respectful interactions, and community members who are empowered and trained to promote and defend the dignity of self and others. In

¹ Ontario Council of Catholic Bishops (1989). *This Moment of Promise-A Pastoral Letter on Catholic Education in Ontario*.

² John Paul II, *Truth, the Power of Peace*, Peace Day, January 1, 1980.

³ Trafford, L. (1998). *Educating the Soul; Writing Curriculum for Catholic Secondary Schools*. Toronto: The Institute for Catholic Education, 12.

⁴ *Expectations of the Ontario Catholic School Graduates*, Catholicism’s Core Understanding of the Human Condition, Institute for Catholic Education, 1998.

⁵ Bezzina, Joe P. 10

recognition of our shared human frailties, Catholic schools in Ontario strive to address challenging behaviours by providing appropriate preventative, educative and disciplinary steps that presume a philosophy based on the premise that “human beings are more important than things or structures or ideologies.”⁶

Our Pledge of Excellence towards School Safety

Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board has a vision for a distinctively Catholic approach to school conduct, safety, progressive discipline, and bullying prevention that:

1. ensures that all members enjoy an environment that is comfortable, hospitable and affirming; free from violence, harassment, discrimination or exclusion; and furnished with the necessary supports for members to learn, grow, develop and mature in God’s image;
2. fosters hospitality, inclusion and empathy through programs, training and interventions that strengthen positive relationships in which diversity is welcomed and contributions are valued;
3. expects all members to conform to the highest standards of Catholic behaviour, in keeping with each one’s levels of development, maturity and demonstrated capabilities;
4. encourages collaboration in forging a strong sense of shared responsibility for a positive environment where no one feels isolated and all members feel supported and cared about;
5. orients curricula, programs, training and professional development so that “safe, caring, inclusive and healthy community” messages and virtues formation are nurtured throughout;
6. encourages all members to “put on the mind of Christ” (Phil 2:5; 1Cor. 2:12-16) in applying gospel values and personal conscience in the prayerful discernment of right choices;
7. cultivates an environment wherein the well-being of “persons-in-community” is valued above competition, status, power or success of the individual;
8. ensures that preventative, educative and disciplinary measures are in place at all levels to teach appropriate behaviour; administer formative consequences for hurtful and aggressive behaviours; and implement prudent measures to restore, repair and transform broken relationships;
9. calls all members of the community to take on the role of Christian advocacy by reporting or safely intervening when incidences occur that may undermine the safety of the environment;
10. recognizes that a breach of the Catholic Code of Conduct is a signal to the entire community to look for reasonable and creative ways to reach out to correct, guide, and support the vulnerable member(s) affected by the incident, and to protect the safety and integrity of all;
11. embeds in professional praxis research-proven classroom management strategies, functional behavioural assessment techniques, and biblically-based approaches to the restoration and rehabilitation of individuals and relationships impacted by challenging behaviours; and
12. implements progressive discipline in response to challenging behaviours with the understanding that no transgression is beyond the reach of God’s healing love; that discipline is meant to guide, instruct, correct and encourage; and with the assurance that a “fresh start” is possible for all those who take responsibility for their actions and strive to make amends.

⁶ Donovan, Daniel, *Distinctively Catholic, An Exploration of Catholic Identity*, Paulist Press, New Jersey, 1997.

DUFFERIN-PEEL CATHOLIC DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

POLICY REGULATIONS

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|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| Board Policy Number: | 9.00 |
| Subject: | Interim Omnibus Safe Schools Policy |
| Effective Date: | February 1, 2008 |

BOARD POLICY

The Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board is committed to the creation of safe, caring, inclusive and healthy Catholic communities that ensure the safety, security, affirmation and inclusion of all in nurturing, positive learning environments.

In this community:

1. all shall be held to the highest standards of Catholic behaviour; authentic Catholic culture shall be cultivated;
2. each one shall be called to “put on the mind of Christ” (1Cor.2:12-16) in the exercise of conscience and the discernment/reflection of right choices;
3. program, curriculum, job-training and professional development shall exist to foster respectful climates and compassionate service;
4. healthy relationships in the context of a vibrant Catholic community shall be highly valued;
5. preventative, educative, and disciplinary measures shall be implemented at all levels in the spirit of Christian discipleship;
6. virtue formation shall be actively fostered throughout;
7. a belief in the transformative potential of individuals and situations shall be widely proclaimed, and
8. faith-filled trust in the inherent goodness of all persons created in God's image, and, in the power of God's grace to work in and through us, shall be demonstrated.

BOARD REGULATIONS

9.00.01

CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING⁷ GUIDES THE WAY

The board and local school communities will be guided by Catholic social teaching in the implementation and application of board policies that relate to school safety and progressive discipline. These Catholic principles call attention to a body of doctrine and official Church documents that lay a framework for how Catholics should conduct their lives, and provide us with a vision by which to evaluate human relationships. Catholic social teaching, rooted in the Hebrew and New Testament scriptures, as well as the philosophical and theological traditions of the Church, offer the Dufferin-Peel community a set of principles for reflective practice, criteria for decision-making, and guideposts for action as we collaborate in the creation of safe, caring, inclusive and healthy school communities. The core elements in Catholic social teaching that are pertinent to this enterprise include our shared belief in the goodness of God's

⁷ See Addendum A for a complete summary of *Catholic Social Teachings* made available through the Office for Social Justice, St. Paul, Minnesota.

creation and recognition of the dignity of each person, created in God's image. As God's gift, we believe that each human life has inherent dignity and sacredness. Persons are born as social beings and through their interrelationships and interdependencies each one grows in strength and wisdom.

Human dignity is honoured and healthy community is achieved only if human rights are protected and responsibilities are met. For a Catholic school community this means that individual human rights must be judiciously and compassionately balanced with the obligation that all persons have to contribute to the welfare of the common good.

We are one human family in pursuit of justice and peace, and our moral duty to one another is manifest in the words of Jesus Christ: "Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of my brethren, you did it to me." (Mt. 25:40) A distinct feature of Catholic social teaching is its concern for the poorest members of society. Jesus offered us the supreme exemplar for Christian service when he demonstrated his special love for those most dependent and in need of others. We are called to show the same care for the most vulnerable in our school communities.

9.00.02

EMPOWERING THE LOCAL SCHOOL COMMUNITY

Catholic social teaching, in the principle of subsidiarity⁸, stresses that a higher authority should not do what can be done at a lower level. This suggests that, wherever possible, local school communities will take responsibility for crafting their own grassroots response to provincial legislation and board policy. To this end, school administrators, staff, parents, and community partners will be given the necessary guidance, supports, and freedom to take responsibility for those local initiatives intended to promote school safety and a positive Catholic climate. Similarly, local schools will empower all members of their community to collaborate in practical ways to address local needs by tapping into the unique gifts and strengths of individual community members.

Empowerment is closely tied to the notion of human dignity and freedom. To empower another person implies helping them to grow in freedom to do God's will. Catholics recognize that all power comes from God and that human beings remain accountable for the ways that they use their power. Thus, all persons will be encouraged to seek holiness in their efforts to lovingly and respectfully build a just and caring Catholic community. Ideally, the local response to the board's safe schools initiative will be characterized by:

1. a collaborative process in the development of a whole school approach to school safety;
2. efforts to solicit input from staff, students, parents, parish and community partners;
3. alignment of safe schools goals with the vision of the Ontario Catholic Graduate Expectations;
4. a common language, shared understanding, and a consistent approach to teaching proactive strategies, virtue formation and progressive discipline to address challenging behaviours;
5. opportunities for individuals to be mentored in skills that foster a model of distributive leadership and Catholic community-building; and
6. a communication plan that ensures that all members of the community have knowledge of their rights and responsibilities in contributing to a safe, caring, inclusive and healthy school community.

⁸ This tenet holds that nothing should be done by a larger and more complex organization which can be done as well by a smaller and simpler organization. http://www.acton.org/publications/randl/rl_article_200.php?view=print

9.00.03

IMPORTANCE OF FAITH LEADERS

The role of faith leaders in the Catholic school community is pivotal to the creation of a safe, caring, inclusive and healthy school community. These persons are in a position to communicate in word and in action the Catholic teaching that affirms the dignity of individuals while discouraging individualism. Membership in the human family, and participation in the school community, is the place where relationships are nurtured and service to others is practiced. Faith leaders have the opportunity to model these Catholic values by the work that they do in the exercise of servant leadership. Staff and students in active Christian ministry in the school (e.g. Salesian Retreat Leaders, Youth Ambassadors, Faith Ambassadors, Chaplaincy Leaders, Harmony Student Leaders) collaborate with the principal and other community members to create a safe, caring, inclusive and healthy school community when they strive to:

1. witness to the Good News;
2. incorporate Gospel values in the life of the school community;
3. coordinate activities that promote school unity;
4. encourage communication among varied partners within the school community;
5. organize liturgical celebrations, including Eucharist and liturgies of the Word;
6. facilitate retreats and community-building retreats for staff and students;
7. liaise with local parishes and community agencies to strengthen partnerships;
8. provide pastoral counselling for individual staff and students;
9. refer vulnerable students and staff to appropriate school and community resources;
10. initiate justice and peace issues and coordinate action plans;
11. participate in prevention programs that focus on the building of healthy relationships, virtues formation, and positive problem-solving skills;
12. participate in youth leadership/empowerment programs;
13. participate in school team collaboration to welcome back students after suspension/expulsion;
14. provide counselling for those who have been victimized by other's misconduct;
15. assist with restorative practices that promote healing/reconciliation after an incident; and
16. contribute to the activities of the board's Tragic Response Team, as requested.

9.00.04

ROLE OF THE COMMITTED CARING ADULT

The committed caring adult(s) in a school/board site is a person who has responded to an invitation to be the caring adult for a particular person or persons in the community. The committed caring adult expresses a willingness/eagerness to offer relationship, support or guidance to one or more students/employees who may be vulnerable to involvement in situations/behaviours that could potentially undermine their own safety or well-being, or the safety or well-being of others. These committed caring adults strive to draw the vulnerable members from the margins to the heart of the community. They do so by providing an on-going positive presence in the life of the person with whom they have volunteered to journey. The committed caring adult may demonstrate concern and commitment to the vulnerable member by:

1. inviting the person's involvement in extra-curricular activities;
2. greeting the person and entering into casual conversation, as time and circumstance permit;
3. assisting the person to navigate uncomfortable social situations;
4. facilitating leadership opportunities for the person;
5. introducing the person to others in the community who may share similar interests;
6. teaching skills to improve performance/conduct that contributes to the person's success;
7. demonstrating how involvement in the life of the school community provides opportunities for personal growth and development; and
8. using the principles of "social architecture" to cluster students/workers into meaningful work groups to assist in the growth/development of the vulnerable person.

9.00.05

DUTY TO THE VULNERABLE MEMBER

The Catholic school community will ensure that those who are marginalized, disengaged, lost, or hurt are able to find a valued place in the community. All persons in Dufferin-Peel have the right to feel safe and secure, and be encouraged to maximize their potential. Although care for the vulnerable member is not limited to the student population, children and youth are often particularly vulnerable, and may require additional support in advocating for themselves and accessing appropriate services.

"The aim of our Catholic schools in being together to evangelize must always be to ensure that no matter how lost our youth may have become, as long as we have breath to draw, we will never stop looking for them."⁹

Dufferin-Peel believes that the gospel imperative to recognize the "special presence of Christ" in the least in our midst compels us to provide early identification, intervention and supports for those vulnerable members who are: 1) pre-disposed to engage in activities that contravene the Catholic Code of Conduct, or 2) particularly vulnerable as possible 'targets' of the misconduct of others. In the case of vulnerable students, disciplinary action shall be undertaken with compassion and sensitivity for the mitigating factors¹⁰ that may exist. We are also sensitive to students with exceptionalities or predispositions that may provoke others to react negatively to them, or that may make them susceptible targets for others.

The "duty to the vulnerable member" also extends to those persons who are struggling with unfortunate life challenges or personal difficulties that may predispose them to relationship difficulties, or problems¹¹ with performance or task completion. These persons offer the Catholic community an opportunity to demonstrate compassion by ensuring that no one is left alone or unsupported during a time of difficulty or need. The Catholic principle of 'preferential option for the poor' shall underpin the development of programs to serve the needs of the most vulnerable members. Particular effort shall be made to ensure that vulnerable students who are involved in bullying incidents and/or disciplinary action of any kind are treated with sensitivity to their exceptionalities. Broad consultation with parents and members of the school team can assist in providing a comprehensive understanding of student needs. [See Addendum B for *Duty the Vulnerable-Bullying Incidents* and Addendum C for *Duty to the Vulnerable-Progressive Discipline* for suggested protocols]

⁹ Canadian Catholic School Trustees' Association, Build Bethlehem Everywhere. CCSTA, 2002. Pp. 44-45.

¹⁰ Disciplinary action for students shall be undertaken according to the board-approved Progressive Discipline Protocols; for employees according to GAP 305.00

¹¹ Relationship difficulties, performance or task completion problems may be temporary or on-going and should be dealt with by the principal or supervisor according to board policy related to health and performance.

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ADDENDUM B

DUTY TO THE VULNERABLE -In Progressive Discipline Protocols

The Catholic school community is called to be the “face of Christ” for those who struggle with, or are negatively impacted by, challenging behaviours, attitudes and lifestyles that are associated with student misconduct and student victimization. Thus, progressive discipline will be approached with reverence for the sacred and irreplaceable value of each student, created in the image and likeness of God. In the same way that Jesus identified with those on the margins of society, the Catholic school community must seek out those in need of special support and help them to make their way in the world. The Catholic school community holds out hope for the students who exhibit challenging behaviours. We acknowledge that attainment of Christian maturity is a lifelong process that requires perseverance and humble dependence on God. From the gospel perspective, school communities that do not find creative ways to address the needs of its most vulnerable members have failed to live up to their Christian duty. Therefore, in service of its vulnerable students the Catholic school community’s approach to progressive discipline will:

- 1) be reflective and prayerful in the discernment process regarding how to best handle student misbehaviour and those victimized by it;
- 2) emphasize the importance of using one’s conscience in making good decisions;
- 3) foster a school culture in which school staff are sensitized to the early warning signs of student vulnerabilities and trained to respond appropriately;
- 4) educate the wider student body that each person has an obligation to defend those who are unable to defend themselves; and to speak up and get help when an injustice is witnessed;
- 5) create a climate of open communication in which students and parents feel comfortable in sharing information that would assist the school in supporting its vulnerable students, especially by helping to anticipate problems before they occur;
- 6) focus on the need for reconciliation and restoration of relationships in helping students heal from the divisiveness caused by misbehaviours;
- 7) communicate the message that “all are welcome,” ensuring that students who are consequence for misbehaviour are treated with dignity throughout the disciplinary process, and that the particular consequence is tailored to reflect the individual’s unique vulnerability;
- 8) ensure that “for students with [a disability or] special education needs, interventions, supports, and consequences [are] consistent with the student’s strengths, needs, goals, and expectations contained in his or her Individual Education Plan (IEP);”¹ and
- 9) encourage vulnerable students who are involved in the disciplinary process to make amends, reconcile differences, and participate in other such restorative practices that would help facilitate the student’s successful return to mainstream school life.

¹ Ministry of Education, Policy/Program Memorandum No. 145, Page 3.

ADDENDUM C

DUTY TO THE VULNERABLE-in Bullying Incidents

Bullying is a serious violation of human dignity. A bullying incident is an opportunity to put the Catholic social justice principle of 'preferential option to the poor' into practice. In the bullying dynamic the person who is victimized is powerless in the face of threats and intimidation from someone who is more powerful and has the intention of hurting them. A Christian response to the bullying phenomenon demands that the school community advocates for persons being victimized, and attempts to assist in the transformation of the person(s) engaged in the bullying behaviours. Prudent measures for consideration include:

1. Students at-risk of bullying, or of being targets of bullying, will be carefully monitored in social situations, and provided with gentle coaching and encouragement from adults in the vicinity. Adults need to be aware that "Students with special needs may be more vulnerable to being a victim of bullying, may have a low awareness of victimization, may be aware but may have difficulty telling, and also may be encouraged by peers to bully others." (*Shaping Safer Catholic Schools, A Bullying Prevention Action Plan for Catholic School Leaders*, The Catholic Principal's Council of Ontario, 2006)
2. Support staff will inform teachers and students, as needed, of exceptionalities, such as differing learning abilities, that may result in inappropriate social or communication exchanges by a particular student(s), and that may inadvertently lead to or provoke bullying behaviours. This information should include guidelines about suitable strategies and/or interventions that will help to support special needs students to engage in positive and healthy interactions with peers and adults.
3. The school Safe School Action Team (SSAT) may consider a range of activities to engage vulnerable students in strengthening social skills such as PALS, Circle of Friends, clubs, extra-curricular sports, etc. Prevention strategies that focus on supporting vulnerable students will give due consideration to differentiated instruction requirements in order to meet special needs of individuals, unique circumstances, and the group/relationship dynamics. Progressive discipline approaches will be tailored to meet the special needs of students to ensure that consequences are formative in nature.
4. Parents of vulnerable students will be provided with informal assistance in supporting their child's development and in understanding "early warning signs" of bullying and school reporting protocols.