

Esteemed members of the Board, and fellow concerned citizens,

Thank you for this opportunity to share; I am here today as a member of Centenary's delegation, and also in my capacity as an education researcher, teacher, and fellow citizen of Hamilton. We live in a diverse society in which many varieties of custom, culture, religion, and practical reason condition morality and politics. Thus conflicts are endemic to moral and political matters. A diversity of ideals of the person and of the best social and political (and, educational) arrangements for democracy to flourish is inescapable. Thus a democratic public education has a special responsibility to prepare citizens to engage with these conflicts as a central duty to democratic life itself. Moreover, the protection of the rights of people who have been historically disenfranchised, particularly groups whose ways of life and identities are under constant threat, is part of enshrining an active citizenship in our students by ensuring that diverse groups of people can exist, and engage as part of the educational and broader civic context.

To argue that speech and action that promote hatred should be curtailed by board policy is *not* to stand in the way of freedom, as claimed by some, but to work toward the elimination of all forms of discrimination in Canadian society. As Reverend Irwin has suggested, this activity of promoting equity, of breaking past long-entrenched and narrow views of the world has been part of building social institutions such as the United Church, and indeed, education itself. Let us move forward with this long-awaited and necessary opportunity to entrench equity in our schools at the policy level.

The importance of this policy to cover *all* forms of discrimination enumerated in the policy cannot be underemphasized. To name specific groups, and to proscribe specific forms of discrimination, is to recognize the historic place of real communities in the struggle towards equity. This equity policy also safeguards the possibility that addressing diversity issues can be a genuinely educative endeavour, rather than simply a reactive one occurring when incidents of hate speech or violence occur. In my capacity as a teacher with other school boards in the province, I have found that board-based commitments to equity have allowed me to speak to particular forms of violence and hate-speech, and to structure recognition of diverse groups into curricular choices at the classroom level.

Why is it important to name specific grounds for protection in the guidelines of the proposed equity policy? The need to address specific grounds, such as racial, ethnocultural, socio-economic, and sexual orientation, to name a few, grows from the ways in which society has assigned individuals to groups, and in turn, has assigned value and voice to certain ways of life, and accordingly, devalued or underrepresented others. If we truly seek to remedy historical exclusion, the focus on where the difference has been divided is important. Thus, where anti-harassment is merely a procedural "proscribed" act of guarding against certain incidences of violence, this policy would be an important binding grounds for the development of genuinely educative experiences around what it means for students to engage justly in a diverse society.

Education does not simply prepare students for schooling, but for future citizenship.

We know that ideologies that undermine democracy and perpetuate injustice do not stop at the schoolhouse door; a policy that works towards equity, however, is the starting point to transform both the schools and the society in which children are prepared to be critical, informed, and active citizens, in a world, and in a city-our city- that is unavoidably diverse. The equity policy before the board today represent a commitment and duty to shape education towards the goals of promoting democracy, pluralism, and diversity. Thank you!