Waterloo Catholic District School Board
Quality, Inclusive, Faith Based Education

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Dear WCDSB Community,

We hope that you are well and finding reasons for hope as we journey into June. It has certainly been a most challenging school year. This letter brings an update on the WCDSB decision to fly the Rainbow flag at each of our schools and our Board buildings.
You may be aware of the controversy that unfolded last year when we planned to raise an alternative to the Rainbow Flag in June, which in Canada is known as "*Pride Month*". Since then, we have carefully considered and prayed about what our next step should be to move forward. As indicated above, the decision has been made that we will fly the Rainbow Flag at our Waterloo Catholic schools for the month of June and we wanted you to be aware in advance. We recognize that while this decision will make some people happy, for others it may be a cause for concern or disappointment or even anger.

In its document *Male and Female He Created Them,* the Congregation for Catholic Education states:

> "It is important . . . to educate children and young people to respect every person in their particularity and difference, so that no one should suffer bullying, violence, insults or unjust discrimination based on their specific characteristics (such as special needs, race, religion, sexual tendencies, etc."

Our main reason for flying the Rainbow Flag is to say to all who come to our Catholic Schools that they are coming to a place where they are loved unconditionally by God and will be respected and valued as children of God. It communicates to all our children, youth, staff, and families that the school is a safe, welcoming place to learn and grow.

Bill 13 (the *Accepting Schools Act*) states:

> "All students should feel safe at school and deserve a positive school climate that is inclusive and accepting regardless of race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sex sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, marital status, family status or disability."

Our hope and our goal in flying the Rainbow Flag is to create this safe and positive school climate for all our students.

We are not making a statement about our divergence from the teaching of the Catholic Church with regards to sexual morality. Sexual morality is not the issue. What is at issue is that LGBTQ+ youth are much more likely to do self-harm or take their life than their heterosexual counterparts. Every instance of bullying and abuse towards a LGBTQ+ youth increases the likelihood for serious and/or tragic consequences that were certainly avoidable.

Harvey Milk (the first openly gay man to be elected to public office in the US) commissioned artist Gilbert Baker to design the Pride flag. Milk said this about the Rainbow Flag: *"It's not about personal gain; it's not about ego; it's not about power; it's about giving those young people out there hope."* We are a people of hope and for this reason we will be flying the Rainbow Flag. Our students who identify as part of the 2SLGBTQ+ community desire and deserve to be treated with dignity and respect without fear of bullying, discrimination, and violence.   It is that simple.

Brian Wenke, Executive Director of the "*It Gets Better Project*", believes that the Rainbow Flag's meaning rests not in its individual colours but in the symbolism of the entire spectrum. He describes the rainbow's universal, all-embracing resonance best: "*The rainbow came from earliest recorded history as a symbol of hope. In the Book of Genesis, it appeared as proof of a covenant between God and all living creatures."* It is in this spirit of God's covenantal love for all creatures, that all creation is worthwhile and valuable, that we will fly the Rainbow Flag.

As important partners in Catholic Education, we want to assure you of our deep commitment to authentically living the Catholic faith -- which calls us to create welcoming and inviting communities where, as our WCDSB pastoral plan reminds, all are "*Called to Belong, Gathered to Become and Sent to Build*".

Sincerely,

Loretta Notten
Director of Education