

Frequently Asked Questions Regarding the Enhancement of Caring in Catholic Schools to Address Bullying Related to Sexual Orientation

What is this initiative that has been announced by the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association (OCSTA) and the Bishops of Ontario?

- For the Catholic school community bullying is wrong under any circumstances, at any age.
- Catholic school boards in Ontario are taking another step to further enhance the resources already available in our schools to support students and combat bullying. Students in Catholic high schools who wish to do so will be provided the opportunity to form groups to specifically to address bullying related to sexual orientation.

Why have Catholic school boards in Ontario now decided to provide students in their schools with groups specifically designed to address bullying or harassment of gay students?

- A priority focus of our Catholic schools has always been about ensuring that our students are educated in a safe and caring environment—one that does not tolerate bullying or harassment of any kind and for any reason.
- This initiative responds to the concerns of students in some schools who have identified a need for opportunities for student led groups to address, within a Catholic school environment, the specific issue of bullying related to sexual orientation.
- What we are providing to our students now is an enrichment of our existing services and support that responds to the current needs of students.
- What meets the needs of one student may not meet the needs of all.
- By incorporating this enhancement into our existing, faith-based resources we believe we are improving upon our services to students and responding to current needs.
- The primary goal of these groups, is to combat bullying related to sexual orientation.

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Is there an increase in harassment of this type in Catholic schools?

- We are not aware of an increase in harassment of this type, but ANY type of bullying or harassment in Catholic schools will not be tolerated.
- Catholic schools are places of inclusivity, equity and the acceptance of all people. Compassion, care and service to the most vulnerable in our communities are vital and important tenets of our Catholic faith.

When will Catholic school boards begin to offer students the opportunity to form these groups?

- First, it's important to note that any student in any Catholic school who feels bullied or harassed because of their sexual orientation, ethnicity, physical abilities, or any other factor has always been able to receive support to address their concerns and needs and this will not change.
- Representatives from across our Catholic education community will begin immediately to establish a framework guided by our faith that will help Catholic schools with this initiative.
- It is our expectation that the framework will be available before the beginning of the next school year, which starts in September, 2011.