Charitable Registration Number: 10688 0115 RR0001

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Wellbeing + Mental Health

Monday, March 24, 2025

Waterloo Region Catholic School Board
35 Weber St. W., Unit A
Kitchener, ON, N2H 3Z1

Dear Director Tyrone Dowling and the Trustees of the Waterloo Catholic District School Board,

I'm writing to you today on behalf of Camino Wellbeing + Mental Health, an organization providing wellbeing and mental health support to all people living in the Region of Waterloo. Our services include specialized support for 2SLGBTQIA+ youth through our OK2BME program—support that extends directly to students and educators in WCDSB schools.

We're reaching out in the spirit of meaningful partnership to express our deep concern about current conversations regarding the Pride flag, classroom representation, and what are being referred to as 'political' symbols. Specifically, we urge you to maintain the Pride flag in June, and to preserve books, classroom and school materials that reflect diverse identities throughout the year.

All students deserve to feel safe, supported, and valued. Mental wellbeing is directly tied to students feeling seen and supported. The current discussions about removing books, the flag and other inclusive symbols impact student wellbeing, identity, and sense of belonging. Exclusion and censorship can lead to increased anxiety, isolation, and distress among vulnerable youth.

As per the latest CYPT survey, we know that youth are looking for more sense of representation and belonging. Flying the Pride flag and keeping inclusive, diverse resources in schools are simple yet powerful ways to tell all students, educators, and families: "You are seen. You belong here." Choosing not to take these actions sends the opposite message—and that causes real harm to vulnerable students in this community.

The research is clear. One of the strongest protective factors for 2SLGBTQIA+ youth is having a safe and accepting school environment. Representation—whether through books, classroom posters,

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or symbols like the Pride flag—matters. It fosters belonging. It reduces isolation. It protects mental wellbeing. And most importantly, it saves lives.

We recognize this is a challenging time, and these conversations are complex. But the existence of queer, trans, and gender-diverse people is not up for debate. Anti-2SLGBTQIA+ sentiment—whether through censorship or silence—has significant impacts, not just on individual mental health, but on the collective wellbeing of our community.

As an organization whose vision is *"A Connected Community Where All People Thrive,"* we ask that the WCDSB commit to upholding its own Equity Action Plan and Mental Health and Wellbeing Plan, and continue building a community where every staff, student, and community member feels safe, valued, and seen, centring the needs of those who are disproportionately impacted.

Camino has long been proud to work alongside WCDSB to support student wellbeing. We remain committed to that partnership. If there is anything we can do to assist you in taking these next steps, we hope you will connect with us.

Sincerely,

Tracy Elop
Chief Executive Officer
Camino Wellbeing + Mental Health

Further reading:

CYPT 2023 Youth Impact Survey: https://childrenandyouthplanningtable.ca/youth-impact-survey/ Egale Still in Every Class in Every School: https://egale.ca/awareness/still-in-every-class/
Rainbow Community Council OutLook Study: https://yourwrrc.ca/rcc/outlook-study/

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