



We are a Christ-centered Catholic faith community  
that celebrates diversity and fosters spiritual growth,  
inspiring all to reach their full potential in mind, body and spirit.

AGENDA AND MATERIAL

**BOARD MEETING**

**TUESDAY, JANUARY 30, 2024  
6:30 P.M.**



*PUBLIC ACCESS LIVE STREAM LINK*  
<https://niagaracatholic.ca/meetings-livestream/>

*FATHER KENNETH BURNS, C.S.C. BOARD ROOM, CATHOLIC EDUCATION CENTRE, WELLAND, ONTARIO*

**A. ROUTINE MATTERS**

- |     |   |        |
|-----|---|--------|
| 1.  | Land Acknowledgement  | -      |
| 2.  | Opening Prayer – Trustee Bruzzese   | -      |
| 3.  | Roll Call   | -      |
| 4.  | Approval of the Agenda  | -      |
| 5.  | Declaration of Conflict of Interest   | -      |
| 6.  | Minutes of the Board Meeting  |        |
| 6.1 | December 19, 2023*  | A6.1   |
| 6.2 | December 19, 2023   | A6.2   |
| 6.3 | January 16, 2024  | A6.3   |
| 6.4 | January 23, 2024  | A6.4   |
| 7.  | <u>Consent Agenda Items</u>   |        |
| 7.1 | Unapproved Minutes of the Committee of the Whole Meeting of January 16, 2024 and Consideration of Recommendations | A7.1   |
|     | 7.1.1 2024 Board Committee Membership   | A7.1.1 |
|     | 7.1.2 Dress Code – Secondary Uniform – Safe Schools Policy (302.6.6)  | A7.1.2 |
|     | 7.1.3 Safe and Accepting Schools Policy (302.6)   | A7.1.3 |
|     | 7.1.4 Corporate Cards, Purchasing Cards and Petty Cash Policy (600.4)   | A7.1.4 |
| 7.2 | Approved Minutes of the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) Meeting of December 6, 2023                   | A7.2   |
| 7.3 | Approved Minutes of the Niagara Catholic Parent Involvement Committee (NCPIC) Meeting of November 2, 2023         | A7.3   |
| 7.4 | In-Camera Agenda Items F1, F2, F3, F8.1 & F8.2  | -      |

**B. DELEGATIONS/PRESENTATIONS**

**C. COMMITTEE AND STAFF REPORTS**

- |    |  |    |
|----|--|----|
| 1. | Director’s Annual Report   | C1 |
| 2. | Niagara Catholic Graduation Rates for the 2017-2018 Grade 9 Cohort as of August 31, 2022 | C2 |
| 3. | Revised Estimates for the year 2023-2024   | C3 |

**D. TRUSTEE ITEMS, OPEN QUESTION PERIOD & OTHER BUSINESS**

- |  |      |
|--|------|
| 1. Correspondence  | -    |
| 1.1 Letter from Minister Parsa   | D1.1 |
| 2. Report on Trustee Conferences Attended  | -    |
| 3. General Discussion to Plan for Future Action  | -    |
| 4. Trustee Information   |      |
| 4.1 Calendar of Events – February 2024   | D4.1 |
| 4.2 Travel Reimbursement Update  | D4.2 |
| 5. Open Question Period  |      |
| <i>(The purpose of the Open Question Period is to allow members of the Catholic school supporting public to ask about items on that night's public agenda or any previous agendas, and the Board to answer and react.)</i> |      |

**E. NOTICES OF MOTION**

- |                                  |   |
|----------------------------------|---|
| 1. Notice of Motion Submission   | - |
| 2. Notice of Motion Presentation | - |

**F. BUSINESS IN CAMERA****G. REPORT ON IN CAMERA SESSION****H. FUTURE MEETINGS AND EVENTS****I. MOMENT OF SILENT REFLECTION FOR LIFE****J. ADJOURNMENT**

**TO: NIAGARA CATHOLIC DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD  
BOARD MEETING  
JANUARY 30, 2024**

***PUBLIC SESSION***

**TITLE: MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL BOARD MEETING OF  
DECEMBER 19, 2023**

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**RECOMMENDATION**

**THAT** the Niagara Catholic District School Board approve the Minutes of the Special Board Meeting of December 19, 2023, as presented.



# MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL BOARD MEETING

**TUESDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2023  
5:00 P.M.**

Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Niagara Catholic District School Board, held on Tuesday, December 19, 2023 at 5:00 p.m. in the Father Kenneth Burns c.s.c Board Room, at the Catholic Education Centre, 427 Rice Road, Welland.

The meeting was called to order at 5:00 p.m. by Chair Di Lorenzo.

## A. ROUTINE MATTERS

### 1. Opening Prayer

Opening Prayer were led by Trustee Bruzzese.

### 2. Roll Call

Chair Di Lorenzo noted that Trustee Benoit asked to be excused and Trustee Burkholder joined electronically.

Trustee Turner acted as Vice-Chair for Trustee Burkholder.

Trustee	Present	Present Electronically	Absent	Excused
Natalia Benoit				✓
Joseph Bruzzese	✓			
Rhianon Burkholder		✓		
Danny Di Lorenzo	✓			
Larry Huibers	✓			
Doug Joyner	✓			
Jim Marino	✓			
Paul Turner	✓			

The following staff were in attendance:

**Camillo Cipriano**, Director of Education; **Anna Pisano**, Recording Secretary/Administrative Assistant, Corporate Services

**3. Approval of the Agenda**

Moved by Trustee Bruzzese

Seconded by Trustee Marino

**THAT** the Niagara Catholic District School Board approve the Agenda of the Special Board Meeting of December 19, 2023, as presented.

**CARRIED**

**4. Declaration of Conflict of Interest**

No Declaration of Conflict of Interest were declared with any items on the agenda.

**B. BUSINESS IN CAMERA**

Moved by Trustee Turner

Seconded by Trustee Bruzzese

**THAT** the Niagara Catholic District School Board move into the In Camera Session.

**CARRIED**

The Niagara Catholic District School Board moved into the In Camera Session of the Special Board Meeting at 5:05 p.m. and reconvened at 5:30 p.m.

**C. REPORT ON THE IN-CAMERA SESSION**

Moved by Trustee Turner

Seconded by Trustee Bruzzese

**THAT** the Niagara Catholic District School Board report the motions from the In Camera Session of the Special Board Meeting of December 19, 2023.

**CARRIED**

Board reviewed a formal complaint against Niagara Catholic employees.

Moved by Trustee

Seconded by Trustee

**THAT** the Niagara Catholic District School Board approve the recommendation as outlined in Item B1 of the In Camera Agenda.

**CARRIED (Item B1)**

**D. MOMENT OF SILENT REFLECTION FOR LIFE**

**E. ADJOURNMENT**

Moved by Trustee Turner

Seconded by Trustee Huibers

**THAT** the December 19, 2023 Special Meeting of the Niagara Catholic District School Board be adjourned.

**CARRIED**

This meeting was adjourned at 5:32 p.m.

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Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Niagara Catholic District School Board held on **December 19, 2023**.

Approved on the **January 30, 2024**.

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Danny Di Lorenzo  
Chair of the Board

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Camillo Cipriano  
Director of Education/Secretary -Treasurer

**TO: NIAGARA CATHOLIC DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD  
BOARD MEETING  
JANUARY 30, 2024**

***PUBLIC SESSION***

**TITLE: MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING OF  
DECEMBER 19, 2023**

---

**RECOMMENDATION**

**THAT the Niagara Catholic District School Board approve the Minutes of the Board Meeting of December 19, 2023, as presented.**



## MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING

**TUESDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2023**

Minutes of the Meeting of the Niagara Catholic District School Board, held on Tuesday, December 19, 2023, in the Father Kenneth Burns c.s.c. Board Room, at the Catholic Education Centre, 427 Rice Road, Welland.

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m. by Chair Di Lorenzo.

### A. ROUTINE MATTERS

1. Land Acknowledgement

Land Acknowledgement statement was delivered by Superintendent Rocca.

2. Opening Prayer

Opening Prayers were led by Trustee Huibers.

3. Roll Call

Chair Di Lorenzo noted that Trustee Benoit, Student Trustees Geremia and Johnstone asked to be excused and Trustee Burkholder joined electronically.

Trustee Turner acted as Vice-Chair for Trustee Burkholder.

Trustee	Present	Present Electronically	Absent	Excused
Natalia Benoit				✓
Joseph Bruzzese	✓			
Rhianon Burkholder		✓		
Danny Di Lorenzo	✓			
Larry Huibers	✓			
Doug Joyner	✓			
Jim Marino	✓			
Paul Turner	✓			
<b>Student Trustees</b>				
Charlotte Johnstone				✓
Emilio Geremia				✓



The following staff were in attendance:

**Camillo Cipriano**, Director of Education; **Lee Ann Forsyth-Sells**, **Gino Pizzoferrato**, **Pat Rocca**, **Domenic Massi**, **Joseph Zaroda**, Superintendents of Education; **Giancarlo Vetrone**, Superintendent of Business & Financial Services; **Clark Euale**, Controller of Facilities Services; **Julia Tiessen**, Executive Officer of Human Resources; **Anna Pisano**, Recording Secretary/Administrative Assistant, Corporate Services

4. **Approval of the Agenda**

Moved by Trustee Bruzzese  
Seconded by Trustee Marino

**THAT** the Niagara Catholic District School Board approve the Agenda of the Board Meeting of December 19, 2023, as presented.

**CARRIED**

5. **Declaration of Conflict of Interest**

No Declaration of Conflict of Interest were declared with any items on the Agenda.

6. **Approval of Minutes of the Board Meeting**

6.1 **November 28, 2023**

Moved by Trustee Huibers  
Seconded by Trustee Bruzzese

**THAT** the Niagara Catholic District School Board approve the Minutes of the Board Meeting of November 28, 2023, as presented.

**CARRIED**

6.2 **December 5, 2023**

Moved by Trustee Joyner  
Seconded by Trustee Turner

**THAT** the Niagara Catholic District School Board approve the Minutes of the Board Meeting of December 5, 2023, as presented.

**CARRIED**

7. **Consent Agenda Items**

Trustee Di Lorenzo requested Item A7.6 be held. This item was moved to Committee and Staff Reports Section C3 of the agenda.

7.1 **Unapproved Minutes of the Committee of the Whole Meeting of December 5, 2023 and Consideration of Recommendations**

**THAT** the Niagara Catholic District School Board receive the unapproved Minutes of the Committee of the Whole of December 5, 2023, as presented.

**7.2 Trustee Honorarium for the Year November 15, 2023 to November 14, 2024**

**THAT** the Niagara Catholic District School Board approve the Trustee Honorarium for the year period from November 15, 2023 to November 14, 2024, as noted in Appendix A, as follows:

\$16,515 for the Chairperson of the Board  
\$13,493 for the Vice-Chairperson of the Board  
\$10,470 for the Other Trustees

**7.3 Trustee Expenses and Reimbursement for the Fiscal Year 2022-2023**

Presented for information.

**7.4 Approved Minutes of the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) Meeting of October 4, 2023**

**THAT** the Niagara Catholic District School Board receive the Approved Minutes of the Special Education Advisory Committee Meeting of October 4, 2023, as presented.

**7.5 Approved Minutes of the Niagara Catholic Parent Involvement Committee (NCPIC) of May 11, 2023**

**THAT** the Niagara Catholic District School Board receive the approved Minutes of the Niagara Catholic Parent Involvement Committee Meeting of May 11, 2023, as presented for information

**7.6 Extended Overnight Field Trip, Excursion and Exchange**

Moved to Section C3

**7.7 In-Camera Items F1, F2 & F3**

Moved by Trustee Joyner  
Seconded by Trustee Marino

**THAT** the Niagara Catholic District School Board adopt the consent agenda items.

**CARRIED**

**B. DELEGATIONS/PRESENTATIONS**

**1. Christmas Cards**

Director Cipriano provided background information on the design of the Christmas Cards.

Director Cipriano and Chair Di Lorenzo presented each student whose artwork was chosen to represent Niagara Catholic with a boxed set containing their designs, a plaqued picture of their artwork and a Niagara Catholic “Excellence in Arts” pin.

## **C. COMMITTEE AND STAFF REPORTS**

### **1. E-Learning**

Joseph Zaroda, Superintendent of Education presented background information on the e-Learning program and introduced John Belcastro, Principal of Continuing Education and eLearning and Jeff Maxwell, Technology Enabled Learning and Teaching Consultant.

Principal Belcastro and Mr. Maxwell presented the e-Learning report for Trustee information.

Principal Belcastro and Mr. Maxwell answered questions of Trustees.

### **2. Niagara Catholic Equity Action Plan 2023-2026**

Lee Ann Forsyth-Sells, Superintendent of Education presented the Niagara Catholic Equity Action Plan 2023-2026 for information.

### **3. Consent Agenda Item A7.6**

#### **3.1 Extended Overnight Field Trip, Excursion and Exchange**

Superintendent Zaroda answered questions of Trustees. Following discussion a decision was reached to enhance the clarity of language in the Educational Field Trips Administrative Operational Procedures.

## **D. TRUSTEE ITEMS, OPEN QUESTION PERIOD & OTHER BUSINESS**

### **1. Correspondence**

#### **1.1 Letter From Minister Lecce**

Director Cipriano highlighted information contained in the letter from Minister Lecce.

### **2. Report on Trustee Conferences Attended**

Nil Report

### **3. General Discussion to Plan for Future Action**

Nil Report

### **4. Trustee Information**

#### **4.1 Calendar of Events – January 2024**

Director Cipriano presented the January 2024 calendar of events.

#### **4.2 OCSTA 2024 AGM & Conference – May 2-4, 2024**

Director Cipriano reminded Trustees of the OCSTA 2024 AGM & Conference on May 2-4, 2024.

Trustees were asked to confirm their attendance with Anna Pisano.

Trustee Marino brought attention to the Trade Education Partners Breakfast held at Holy Cross Secondary School on December 12<sup>th</sup>. While acknowledging its success and the valuable information shared, he emphasized the need for increased efforts in promoting the programs and the numerous job opportunities within the trade industry.

**5. Open Question Period**

None Submitted

**E. NOTICES OF MOTION**

**1. NOTICE OF MOTION SUBMISSION**

None Submitted

**2. NOTICE OF MOTION PRESENTATION**

None Presented

**F. BUSINESS IN CAMERA**

Addressed within consent agenda section.

**G. REPORT ON THE IN-CAMERA SESSION**

**SECTION B: STUDENT TRUSTEES EXCLUDED**

Moved by Trustee Joyner  
Seconded by Trustee Marino

**THAT** the Niagara Catholic District School Board approve the Minutes of the In Camera Session of the Board Meeting - SECTION B: Student Trustees Excluded of November 28, 2023, as presented.

**CARRIED (Item F1)**

**H. FUTURE MEETINGS AND EVENTS**

**I. MOMENT OF SILENT REFLECTION FOR LIFE**

**J. ADJOURNMENT**

Moved by Trustee Bruzzese  
Seconded by Trustee Marino

**THAT** the December 19, 2023 meeting of the Niagara Catholic District School Board be adjourned.

**CARRIED**

This meeting was adjourned at 7:35 p.m.

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Minutes of the Meeting of the Niagara Catholic District School Board held on **December 19, 2023**.

Approved on **January 30, 2024**.

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Danny Di Lorenzo  
Chair of the Board

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Camillo Cipriano  
Director of Education/Secretary -Treasurer

**TO: NIAGARA CATHOLIC DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD  
BOARD MEETING  
JANUARY 30, 2024**

***PUBLIC SESSION***

**TITLE: MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL BOARD MEETING OF  
JANUARY 16, 2024**

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**RECOMMENDATION**

**THAT** the Niagara Catholic District School Board approve the Minutes of the Special Board Meeting of January 16, 2024, as presented.



# MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL BOARD MEETING

**TUESDAY, JANUARY 16, 2024**

Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Niagara Catholic District School Board, held on Tuesday, January 16, 2024 at 8:15 p.m. in the Father Kenneth Burns c.s.c Board Room, at the Catholic Education Centre, 427 Rice Road, Welland.

The meeting was called to order at 8:15 p.m. by Chair Di Lorenzo.

## A. ROUTINE MATTERS

### 1. Opening Prayer

Opening Prayer were led by Trustee Marino.

### 2. Roll Call

Chair Di Lorenzo noted that Trustee Benoit asked to be excused.

Chair Di Lorenzo noted that Trustee's Benoit and Turner joined electronically.

Trustee	Present	Present Electronically	Absent	Excused
Natalia Benoit		✓		
Joseph Bruzzese	✓			
Rhianon Burkholder	✓			
Danny Di Lorenzo	✓			
Larry Huibers	✓			
Doug Joyner	✓			
Jim Marino	✓			
Paul Turner		✓		

Special Guest:

**Nadya Tymochenko, Board Legal Counsel**

The following staff were in attendance:

**Camillo Cipriano**, Director of Education; **Anna Pisano**, Recording Secretary/Administrative Assistant, Corporate Services

**3. Approval of the Agenda**

Moved by Trustee Marino

Seconded by Trustee Bruzzese

**THAT** the Niagara Catholic District School Board approve the Agenda of the Special Board Meeting of January 16, 2024, as presented.

**CARRIED**

**4. Declaration of Conflict of Interest**

No Declaration of Conflict of Interest were declared with any items on the agenda.

**B. BUSINESS IN CAMERA**

Moved by Trustee Burkholder

Seconded by Trustee Joyner

**THAT** the Niagara Catholic District School Board move into the In Camera Session.

**CARRIED**

The Niagara Catholic District School Board moved into the In Camera Session of the Special Board Meeting at 8:17 p.m. and reconvened at 9:06 p.m.

**C. REPORT ON THE IN-CAMERA SESSION**

Moved by Trustee Burkholder

Seconded by Trustee Joyner

**THAT** the Niagara Catholic District School Board report the motions from the In Camera Session of the Special Board Meeting of January 16, 2024.

**CARRIED**

There has been a request for clarification directed to Trustee Benoit.

**D. MOMENT OF SILENT REFLECTION FOR LIFE**

**E. ADJOURNMENT**

Moved by Trustee Bruzzese

Seconded by Trustee Burkholder

**THAT** the January 16, 2024 Special Meeting of the Niagara Catholic District School Board be adjourned.

**CARRIED**

This meeting was adjourned at 9:07 p.m.



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Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Niagara Catholic District School Board held on **January 16, 2024**.

Approved on the **January 30, 2024**.

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Danny Di Lorenzo  
Chair of the Board

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Camillo Cipriano  
Director of Education/Secretary -Treasurer

**TO: NIAGARA CATHOLIC DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD  
BOARD MEETING  
JANUARY 30, 2024**

***PUBLIC SESSION***

**TITLE: MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL BOARD MEETING OF  
JANUARY 23, 2024**

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**RECOMMENDATION**

**THAT** the Niagara Catholic District School Board approve the Minutes of the Special Board Meeting of January 23, 2024, as presented.



# MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL BOARD MEETING

**TUESDAY, JANUARY 23, 2024**

Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Niagara Catholic District School Board, held on Tuesday, January 23, 2024 at 6:00 p.m. in the Father Kenneth Burns c.s.c Board Room, at the Catholic Education Centre, 427 Rice Road, Welland.

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. by Chair Di Lorenzo.

## A. ROUTINE MATTERS

Land Acknowledgement statement was delivered by Trustee Joyner.

### 1. Opening Prayer

Opening Prayer were led by Trustee Turner.

### 2. Roll Call

Chair Di Lorenzo noted that Trustee Benoit joined electronically.

Trustee	Present	Present Electronically	Absent	Excused
Natalia Benoit		✓		
Joseph Bruzzese	✓			
Rhianon Burkholder	✓			
Danny Di Lorenzo	✓			
Larry Huibers	✓			
Doug Joyner	✓			
Jim Marino	✓			
Paul Turner	✓			

The following staff were in attendance:

**Camillo Cipriano**, Director of Education; **Lee Ann Forsyth-Sells**, **Kimberly Kinney**, **Gino Pizzoferrato**, **Pat Rocca**, Superintendents of Education; **Giancarlo Vetrone**, Superintendent of Business & Financial Services; **Clark Euale**, Controller of Facilities Services; **Julia Tiessen**, Executive Officer of Human Resources; **Anna Pisano**, Recording Secretary/Administrative Assistant, Corporate Services

Special Guest:

**Nadya Tymochenko**, Board Legal Counsel

**3. Approval of the Agenda**

Moved by Trustee Marino

Seconded by Trustee Turner

**THAT** the Niagara Catholic District School Board approve the Agenda of the Special Board Meeting of January 23, 2024, as presented.

**CARRIED**

**4. Declaration of Conflict of Interest**

No Declaration of Conflict of Interest were declared with any items on the agenda.

**5. Trustee Code of Conduct Investigation Report**

Chair Di Lorenzo emphasized the Trustee Code of Conduct Policy and the findings of the independent investigation conducted by Parker Sim LLP.

Chair Di Lorenzo noted that as per the Trustee Code of Conduct Policy, the investigation report will be added to the minutes as Appendix A

A recorded vote was taken to accept the investigation report.

<b>NAME</b>	<b>YEA</b>	<b>NAY</b>
Joseph Bruzzese		✓
Rhianon Burkholder	✓	
Larry Huibers	✓	
Doug Joyner	✓	
Jim Marino	✓	
Paul Turner	✓	
Danny Di Lorenzo	✓	

After discussion, the following motion was put forth;

Moved by Trustee Burkholder

Seconded by Trustee Marino

**THAT** based on the independent investigation by Parker Sim LLP, the Niagara Catholic District School Board finds Trustee Benoit in breach of the Trustee Code of Conduct.

A recorded vote was taken

NAME	YEA	NAY
Joseph Bruzzese		✓
Rhianon Burkholder	✓	
Larry Huibers	✓	
Doug Joyner	✓	
Jim Marino	✓	
Paul Turner	✓	
Danny Di Lorenzo	✓	

**CARRIED**

Following this decision further discussion took place regarding disciplinary action.

Trustee Burkholder took over as chair at this time.

The following motion was put forth;

Moved by Trustee Di Lorenzo

Seconded by Trustee Bruzzese

**THAT** the Niagara Catholic District School Board bar Trustee Benoit from attending all Board and Committee meetings, and further censures and relieves Trustee Benoit of all duties and roles as a Trustee until June 30, 2024.

A recorded vote was taken.

NAME	YEA	NAY
Paul Turner	✓	
Jim Marino	✓	
Doug Joyner	✓	
Larry Huibers	✓	
Joseph Bruzzese	✓	
Paul Turner	✓	
Danny Di Lorenzo	✓	

**CARRIED**

Trustee Di Lorenzo took over as chair at this time.

The following motion was put forth;

Moved by Trustee Burkholder

Seconded by Trustee Huibers

**THAT** the Niagara Catholic District School Board resolve to disassociate itself from any actions or statements previously made by Trustee Benoit.

A recorded vote was taken.

NAME	YEA	NAY	ABSTAIN
Paul Turner	✓		
Jim Marino	✓		
Doug Joyner	✓		
Larry Huibers	✓		
Joseph Bruzzese			✓
Paul Turner	✓		
Danny Di Lorenzo	✓		

**CARRIED**

**B. BUSINESS IN CAMERA**

**C. REPORT ON THE IN-CAMERA SESSION**

**D. MOMENT OF SILENT REFLECTION FOR LIFE**

**E. ADJOURNMENT**

Moved by Trustee Burkholder

Seconded by Trustee Marino

**THAT** the January 23, 2024 Special Meeting of the Niagara Catholic District School Board be adjourned.

**CARRIED**

This meeting was adjourned at 6:49 p.m.

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Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Niagara Catholic District School Board held on **January 23, 2024**.

Approved on the **January 30, 2024**.

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Danny Di Lorenzo  
Chair of the Board

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Camillo Cipriano  
Director of Education/Secretary -Treasurer

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**Investigation into a Complaint Pursuant to the Trustee Code of Conduct Policy, Board  
Policy No. 100.12 of the Niagara Catholic District School Board**

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**CONFIDENTIAL**

**Investigator: Cenobar Parker  
Parker Sim LLP**

**25 Adelaide Street East, Suite 1040  
Toronto, ON M5C 3A1**

**Finalized Report Submitted: December 13, 2023**



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## I. INTRODUCTION

Parker Sim LLP (the “Investigator”) was retained by the Niagara Catholic District School Board (the “Board”) to investigate a complaint delivered by Trustee Paul Turner against Trustee Natalia Benoit arising out of comments made by Trustee Benoit following a regular Board meeting on May 23, 2023 (the “Complaint”).<sup>1</sup>


The Complaint alleges that Trustee Benoit violated the Trustee Code of Conduct Policy, Board Policy No. 100.12 (the “Code of Conduct”) for the following reasons:

1. The comparison of flying the Pride Flag to Flying the Nazi Flag. This statement was made on the steps of the Catholic Education Center following the May 23, 2023, Committee of the Whole Meeting. Her dialogue on the steps was recorded and is available on YouTube. It is my belief that you cannot compare a flag that is meant to promote love and acceptance to one that represents hatred, division, and isolation.
2. During her dialogue on the steps, Trustee Natalia Benoit provided wrong information to the people. She did not correctly explain Robert’s Rules and the process for passing a motion. During her dialogue on the steps she portrayed the process that took place during the meeting as being railroaded.
3. Trustee Natalia Benoit created an atmosphere that was chaotic and could have possibly put some individuals at risk.
4. Natalia Benoit supported the parents in saying that action needed to be taken. When someone said that parents should pull their children from (*sic*) school because of the flying of the Pride Flag, Natalia replied “ya ya.” This is unbecoming behaviour of a Trustee who is elected to support student achievement and promote the Boards catholic identity.
5. Natalia Benoit is not the spokesperson for the Board, only the Chair of the Board and Director can speak on behalf of the Board. Natalia was totally out of line taking center court on the steps and addressing an audience.

The Complaint was delivered on June 6, 2023, pursuant to the Code of Conduct. Our mandate is to investigate the allegations set out in the Complaint against Trustee Benoit and to provide an opinion with respect to whether they are substantiated. If the allegations are

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix A1: The Complaint of Trustee Paul Turner against Trustee Natalia Benoit Dated May 6, 2023



substantiated, we then provide an opinion as to whether they constitute a violation of the Code of Conduct.

In particular, our mandate in conducting this investigation is to investigate and determine, on a balance of probabilities, whether the Code of Conduct has been violated. This requires the determination of (1) factual findings related to the allegations, and (2) determinations as to whether, on the basis of our factual findings, the Respondent engaged in conduct in violation of the Code of Conduct. We have not been requested to make, and therefore have not made, any recommendations as to the appropriate corrective action, if any, based on our findings.

We conducted a comprehensive investigation of the Complaint, which included interviews with the parties as well as: the Director of Education for the Board, Camillo Cipriano, Trustee Larry Huibers, and Vice-Chair of the Board Trustee Rhianon Burkholder. Attempts were made to contact Trustee Joe Bruzzese and his wife, Debra Bruzzese, however the investigator was not able to connect with either Trustee Bruzzese or his wife prior to September 29, 2023 when counsel for the Board advised the Investigator that the Board approved a request by Trustee Benoit to take a leave of absence until January 29, 2024.<sup>2</sup> Further attempts to schedule an interview with Trustee Bruzzese were made in October 2023, without success.<sup>3</sup> As a result, these interviewees were not pursued further in advance of finalizing this report. If determined to be necessary in the future, the investigator would be happy to reach back out to Trustee Bruzzese for an interview.

We invited the parties to deliver documents they considered relevant to the investigation. These primarily consist of: comments received by Trustee Turner in respect of Trustee Benoit's proposed policy to prohibit certain symbols at the Board (discussed in more detail below), and various links to YouTube videos and media coverage of Trustee Benoit on the steps of the Board office after the Board meeting on May 23, 2023. Where these are relevant, they have been referred to in our analysis.

Unfortunately, by the time of our formal retainer the previously publicly available YouTube video, which depicted the specific comments made by Trustee Benoit that form the basis of the Complaint, was no longer available. We requested a copy of the video from the Board and all of the interviewees, but none was able to be provided. Trustee Benoit advised that she contacted the author of the video, Peter Taras, but was unable to reach him.<sup>4</sup> At the time of

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix C: Email from Nadya Tymochenko to Cenobar Parker dated September 29, 2023 re Trustee Benoit's leave of absence

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix D: Email Thread Between Trustee Joe Bruzzese and Cenobar Parker dated October 16, 2023 re Scheduling an Interview

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix E1: Email from Trustee Natalia Benoit to Cenobar Parker dated August 30, 2023

writing this Report, we were therefore only able to review a shorter clip of the video accessible online through media coverage of the incident.<sup>5</sup>

It is in part due to the inability to review the entire video of Trustee Benoit's comments that the investigator interviewed Director Cipriano, Trustee Huibers and Trustee Burkholder, and tried to interview Trustee Bruzzese and his wife, as persons allegedly in close proximity to her during Trustee Benoit's comments.

After careful consideration of the evidence gathered, we have concluded that the following allegations are substantiated, and that Trustee Benoit violated the Code of Conduct:

- By comparing the flying of the Pride flag to flying the Nazi flag after the Board meeting on May 23, 2023;
- By mischaracterizing the events at the Board meeting on May 23, 2023, failing to acknowledge that the Board's decision was consistent with its process as set out in the Bylaws and by implying that the Board acted improperly in waiting to vote on the Policy until June 2023;
- In supporting a parent's comment that children should be removed from the Niagara Catholic District School Board; and
- In speaking publicly in a manner that could have been understood as speaking on behalf of the Board.

We have declined to find, on a balance of probabilities, that Trustee Benoit created a chaotic atmosphere or one that could have possibly put some individuals at risk at, or immediately after, the Board meeting, on May 23, 2023. This Report begins with introducing the parties and providing a description of the context in which these events are alleged to have occurred. We then provide a review of the investigation process. Lastly, we set out a description of the evidence, including the credibility and reliability of the persons interviewed, our factual findings, and our analysis, including the applicable legal tests.

We want to thank you for entrusting us with this important and challenging investigation.

Do not hesitate to reach out if we can be of any further assistance.


## **II. THE PARTIES**

### **A. TRUSTEE PAUL TURNER**

The Complainant, Trustee Paul Turner is a Trustee representing Welland at the Board. Trustee Turner was initially elected in 2018. Prior to this, he was a teacher for the Board for

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<sup>5</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9kMT33kC IE> & <https://www.chch.com/niagara-catholic-school-board-trustee-compares-pride-flag-to-a-nazi-flag/>



over 32 years. He is the author of the Complaint submitted to the Board on June 6, 2023 and explained that it was not an easy decision to deliver a complaint against a fellow trustee.

Trustee Turner explained that part of the reason he initiated this complaint is because during his first term as a Trustee, he was the Trustee who initially proposed flying the Pride flag at the Board. At the time, according to Trustee Turner, the Board was working on a multi-year strategic plan which centered around inclusivity, tolerance, and equity. He felt that flying the Pride flag was an important step to providing a safe environment to all persons at the Board. Trustee Turner explained that the first time the Board flew the Pride flag in June 2021, it was done thoughtfully, after a discussion and vote by the Trustees.<sup>6</sup>

Trustee Turner explained that since 2022 the decision to fly the Pride flag has been made by staff and the Director of Education.

Trustee Turner explained that he has nothing personal against Trustee Benoit, but that he brought the complaint out of concern for the integrity of the Board and its process.

#### B. TRUSTEE NATALIA BENOIT

Trustee Natalia Benoit is the Trustee for the areas of St. Catharines and Niagara-on-the-Lake. She was first elected in October 2022. On April 25, 2023, Trustee Benoit submitted a request to implement a new policy at the Board to Chair Danny DiLorenzo.<sup>7</sup> The policy, entitled “Partisan, Political, or Social Policy Advocacy Activities” (the “Policy”) defines its purpose as follows:

##### Purpose

This policy is designed to promote education instead of indoctrination, defined as the endorsement of partisan, political or social policy matters.

Neutrality and balance in classroom instruction are desired to create an optimal learning environment and atmosphere of inclusiveness, where all students are welcome. Because views and beliefs about partisan, political, or social policy matters are often deeply personal, employees should not, during assigned work hours, advocate to students concerning their views or beliefs on these matters. Such advocacy does not contribute to a positive learning climate and may be disruptive, divisive, and

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<sup>6</sup> Note that we confirmed independently via the Board’s website that the Trustees voted on May 25, 2021 to fly the Pride flag for the first time at the Board.

<sup>7</sup> See Appendix F: Email from Trustee Natalia Benoit to Chair DiLorenzo dated April 25, 2023, with Policy Enclosed

distracting. Rather, classroom instruction should relate to approved curriculum. The district's role is to teach students how to think, not what to think, thereby keeping classrooms as places of education, not indoctrination.

Trustee Benoit acknowledged that the Policy she delivered to the Board was edited from a policy implemented in the U.S.A., by the Central Bucks School District ("Central Bucks"). She states that she had to edit the Central Bucks policy "to Catholicize it to be something we apply to our school (*sic*) because I saw that it was working in their school or school board, and I thought that it would be helpful to have something in place like that as well."<sup>8</sup>

According to Trustee Benoit, she needed help editing the Central Bucks policy, so she asked her husband, and then a family friend who referred her to Teresa Pierre, at Parents as First Educators ("PAFE").

Trustee Benoit underscores the broad application of the proposed Policy and denies that it targets the Pride flag or any specific community within the Board.

As is detailed below, Trustee Benoit, who is a new Trustee and acknowledges having a lack of familiarity with the Board's processes, states that she understood that the Board would be voting on her Policy at the regularly scheduled Board meeting on May 23, 2023.

There is no question that had the Policy been adopted by the Board on May 23, 2023, the Pride flag would not have flown commencing June 1, 2023.

### **III. THE POLICY AND MANDATE**

Parker Sim LLP was retained to conduct a neutral and independent investigation of the Complaint in accordance with the Formal Process set out in the Code of Conduct. As noted above, our mandate is to investigate and determine whether it was more likely than not that the Respondent violated the Code of Conduct. We reiterate that it is beyond the scope of our investigation to make recommendations with respect to any remedies that might result.

We first interviewed Trustee Turner at his home in Welland on August 16, 2023. Trustee Benoit was interviewed virtually via Microsoft Teams on August 18, 2023. We then interviewed Director Camillo Cipriano on September 7, 2023 and Trustees Huibers and Burkholder via Microsoft Teams on September 14, 2023.<sup>9</sup> Following each interview, the

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<sup>8</sup> See Appendix A3: The Statement of Trustee Natalia Benoit signed September 7, 2023 ("Trustee Benoit Statement"), page 4.

<sup>9</sup> See Appendix A2: The Statement of Trustee Paul Turner signed August 21, 2023 ("Trustee Turner Statement"); Appendix A4: The Statement of Director Camilo Cipriano signed September 12, 2023 ("Director Cipriano Statement"); Appendix A6: The Statement of Trustee Rhianon Burkholder signed October 3, 2023 ("Trustee Burkholder Statement")

Investigator prepared detailed statements of the evidence received which were reviewed and signed by each interviewee.

Prior to the scheduling of their interviews, all interviewees were advised on the importance of confidentiality in the investigation process and provided with a Confidentiality Agreement to review and execute. With the exception of Trustee Benoit, each interviewee executed the Confidentiality Agreement in advance of their interview.<sup>10</sup> At the outset of her interview, Trustee Benoit advised that she was not comfortable signing something she did not fully understand. The confidentiality of the investigation process and its importance to the integrity of the investigation were fully canvassed with Trustee Benoit and she verbally acknowledged her understanding of the importance of confidentiality and agreed to keep the fact of the investigation, as well as any questions asked confidential. Trustee Benoit then signed off on that agreement when she reviewed her statement.<sup>11</sup>

During our interview with Trustee Benoit, she identified three persons who were in close proximity to her when she made her comments outside the Board office: Debra Bruzzese, Peter Taras, and Angela Nicastro. She provided us with the contact information only for Debra Bruzzese and Trustee Joe Bruzzese who we understand to be Mrs. Bruzzese's husband. The investigator contacted Ms. Bruzzese around September 7, 2023. When the investigator did not connect with Ms. Bruzzese, Trustee Benoit was requested to provide her email address. The Investigator followed up with Trustee Benoit to request Ms. Bruzzese as well as Mr. Taras' email addresses or phone numbers.<sup>12</sup> At the time of writing this report, Trustee Benoit had never replied to the Investigator, who was unable to connect with either Ms. Bruzzese or Mr. Taras.

In the intervening period, the Investigator attempted without success to connect with Trustee Bruzzese.

All parties were advised of their right to legal counsel or a support person. All interviewees were advised of their right to a support person. To our knowledge none of the parties retained legal counsel and none of the interviewees relied on any support people.

The investigator was not able to access the video previously posted on Mr. Taras's YouTube channel and appears to have been removed from the internet. What remains is an excerpt of the video embedded within some of the media coverage of Trustee Benoit's comments.<sup>13</sup> These excerpts have been reviewed and considered as part of this investigation.

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<sup>10</sup> See Appendix B: Signed Confidentiality Agreements

<sup>11</sup> See Appendix A3: Trustee Benoit Statement, page 1

<sup>12</sup> See Appendix E3: Email from Cenobar Parker to Trustee Natalia Benoit dated September 11, 2023

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.chch.com/niagara-catholic-school-board-trustee-compares-pride-flag-to-a-nazi-flag/>

All interviewees were asked to provide a copy of the video taken of Trustee Benoit on May 23, 2023. None were able.

Trustee Benoit advised that she had reached out to the owner of the initial video, Mr. Taras, but did not hear back.<sup>14</sup> As noted above, Trustee Benoit ceased communicating with the Investigator and did not provide any contact information for Mr. Taras.

Trustee Burkholder referred the investigator to another video posted on Mr. Taras's YouTube channel from the evening of May 23, 2023, which seems to have been taken after the comments that form the basis of the Complaint.<sup>15</sup>

#### **IV. THE CODE OF CONDUCT**

According to its Mission Statement, the Code of Conduct is part of the Board's governance policies, and is in compliance with the Ontario *Education Act* its Regulations and other "relevant legislation."<sup>16</sup>

The complete Code of Conduct is appended as Appendix H to this report. The Complaint does not identify any specific provisions alleged to have been violated, however for ease of reference, I have reproduced below those provisions of the Code of Conduct that are implicated by the allegations raised in the Complaint.

#### **CATHOLIC FAITH, COMMUNITY AND CULTURE**

Each Niagara Catholic District School Board Trustee shall, within the duties prescribed in the *Education Act*, its Regulations and other applicable legislation and reflecting a ministry within the Church:

- Acknowledge that Catholic schools are an expression of the teaching mission of the Church;
- Provide an example to the Catholic community that reflects the teaching of the Church;
- Provide the best possible Catholic education according to the programs approved by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Minister of Education;
- Recognize and rigorously defend the constitutional right of Catholic education and the democratic and corporate authority of the Board
- Respect the confidentiality of the Board;

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<sup>14</sup> See Appendix E1: Email from Trustee Natalia Benoit to Cenobar Parker dated August 30, 2023

<sup>15</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9kMT33kC\\_1E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9kMT33kC_1E)

<sup>16</sup> *Education Act* [RSO 1990, c E.2.](#)

- Ensure the affairs of the Board are conducted with openness, justice and compassion;
- Work to improve personal knowledge of current Catholic educational research and practices;
- Affirm a strong sense of Christian Catholic community; and
- Provide support, encouragement and prayer for the efforts of all persons engaged in the ministry of Catholic education in Canada.

#### CIVIL BEHAVIOUR AND COMMUNICATION

Trustees shall at all times act with decorum and shall be respectful of other Trustees, the Director of Education, staff, students, all members of the Niagara Catholic community, as well as the public.

Trustees must:

- Respect and comply with all applicable federal, provincial and municipal laws;
- Demonstrate honesty and integrity;
- Respect differences in people, their ideas, and their opinions;
- Treat one another with dignity and respect at all times, and especially when there is disagreement;
- Respect and treat others fairly, regardless of, for example, race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, or disability; and
- Respect the rights of others.

....Subject to the duty of a Trustee under subsection 218.1(e) of the *Education Act* to uphold the implementation of any Board resolution after it is passed by the Board, a Trustee may not make disparaging remarks about another Trustee or a group of Trustees in expressing comments, or disagreement or speculate on the motives of a Trustee, a group of Trustees, or Board staff. With the exception of the Chair of the Board and/or the Director of Education, no individual Trustee or group of Trustees has the authority to speak on behalf of the Board.

Trustees' shall ensure that all information they communicate in the course of their duties is accurate and complete.



## COMPLYING WITH LEGISLATION

All Trustees are expected to comply with the following duties of Board members as set out in section 218.1 of the *Education Act*:

A member of a board shall,

- a) carry out their responsibilities in a manner that assists the board in fulfilling its duties under this Act, the regulations and the guidelines issued under this Act, including but not limited to the board's duties under section 169.1;
- ....
- e) uphold the implementation of any board resolution after it is passed by the board;
- f) entrust the day-to-day operations and management of the board to its staff through the board's director of education;
- g) maintain focus on student achievement and well-being; and
- h) comply with the board's code of conduct.

## UPHOLDING DECISION

Trustees must understand their role as a corporate body and the expectation that they may deliberate with many voices but must act as one.

Trustees must:

Accept that authority rests with the Board and that they have no individual authority other than that delegated by the Board;

- Uphold the implementation of any Board resolution after it is passed by the Board;
- Comply with Niagara Catholic District School Board By-Laws (100.1), Policies and Administrative Procedures; and
- Refrain from speaking on behalf of the Board unless authorized to do so by the Board. The only official spokespersons for the Board are the Chair of the Board and the Director of Education.

## **V. THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK**

In determining whether the allegations amount to a violation of the Code of Conduct, we first consider the evidence as a whole, and whether it is more likely than not that the allegation occurred.

If the allegation is substantiated, we then consider whether the conduct violates any of the provisions of the Code of Conduct.

In considering the comments made by Trustee Benoit, and specifically whether they constitute a violation of the Code of Conduct, we have reviewed and taken into consideration the relevant jurisprudence from the Human Rights Tribunal, and specifically whether comparing the Pride flag to the Nazi flag creates a poisoned environment.

## **VI. THE ALLEGATIONS**

The details of the allegations and the relevant evidence are set out below. Given that all interviewees signed off on detailed statements from their interviews, we have only referenced here those aspects of the evidence relied on. All of the evidence was, however, thoroughly considered in the course of our investigation and subsequent deliberation.

## **VII. THE EVIDENCE**

### **A. CREDIBILITY AND RELIABILITY**

The present allegations do not necessarily turn on the *viva voce* evidence of the parties or any witnesses.

The limited excerpt from the video taken, as well as Trustee Benoit's acknowledgement of her comments is highly persuasive in determining, on a balance of probabilities whether the conduct complained of, in fact happened.

Notwithstanding this, in order to evaluate the evidence of each interviewee and come to factual findings we have assessed the credibility and reliability of each person. Credibility relates to the veracity of the evidence and the party's sincerity and truthfulness. Reliability relates to the factual accuracy of the evidence and the party's ability to accurately observe, recall and recount the events.<sup>17</sup>

- Someone can be credible but provide unreliable evidence. Further, a person may be found to be credible in part, with different weight attached to different parts of the evidence. If someone is not found to be credible, their evidence cannot be reliable.

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<sup>17</sup> *R v Morrissey*, 1995 CanLII 3498 (ONCA).

- To assess credibility in the present case, we consider a number of interrelated factors, such as:
  - inconsistencies and weaknesses between evidence as well as the internal inconsistencies within the person's evidence;
  - the ability to review independent evidence that confirms or contradicts the evidence;
  - the ability to assess the evidence with the preponderance of probabilities which a practical and informed person would recognize as reasonable in that context, without relying on frail assumptions about human behaviour;
  - the candour or evasiveness of the party; and
  - the motive and attitude of the party.<sup>18</sup>
- The reliability of someone's evidence can be impacted by a number of factors, such as the passage of time, the impact of trauma, and whether someone is objective or may be biased in some way.

Overall, we found most interviewees to be credible.

Trustee Turner was thoughtful in his evidence. He acknowledged that he had not been present when Trustee Benoit made her statements after the meeting on May 23, 2023, but that the Complaint arose out of his review of the video recording when it was available on YouTube. Trustee Turner expressly struggled with the decision to deliver a complaint against a fellow Trustee and was careful and considered in his evidence: he did not exaggerate or overstate his evidence, but rather provided significant context to explain and justify his concerns. We found his evidence to be both credible and reliable.

Trustee Benoit was initially reticent to speak with us, however during our meeting was generally cooperative. She gave evidence that did not necessarily serve her, for example acknowledging that she was not aware of and did not explain to the crowd of people after the meeting on May 23, 2023, the Board's process as outlined in the Bylaws. However, she presented at times as avoiding direct questions or hesitant: (1) to confirm her recollection of seemingly basic information (for example, the mood of the crowd and whether she commented on the conduct of her fellow trustees) and (2) to share the video taken of her comments made outside of the Board on May 23, 2023. I find it troubling that she was unable to locate a copy of the video, particularly when she acknowledged having the ability to contact its owner – Peter Taras. Her unwillingness to share a copy of the video does impact our assessment of her credibility when it comes to what was said on the steps of the Board's office that evening. This, in turn, impacts the weight we have placed on her evidence as to

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<sup>18</sup> *Re Novac Estate*, 2008 NSSC 283 at paragraphs 36-37.

the explicit comments made (or not). However, it is not determinative. We have considered the totality of the evidence, together with the limited recorded evidence, to make findings of fact on a balance of probabilities.

We found all of the witnesses to be credible. Trustees Huibers and Burkholder in addition to Director Cipriano were direct in their evidence, acknowledging readily the limits of their recollection but providing clear answers which were in many ways corroborated by the objective evidence, including the YouTube video which captures Director Cipriano's attempted communication with Trustee Benoit on the steps. They all similarly demonstrated significant understanding and empathy for Trustee Benoit. I note, however, that the evidence of the witnesses was at times inconsistent. For example, it was unanimous that Trustees Huibers and Burkholder went outside to hear Trustee Benoit speak together, though each had a slightly different recollection of when they went outside and what they heard. Given the passage of time and the fact that a video recording of the incident circulated for some time which could impact what each thought they heard in person, I found these discrepancies to impact the reliability of their evidence. This is addressed when considering the evidence below.

#### B. THE MAY 23, 2023 BOARD MEETING

As noted above, in advance of the May 23, 2023 Board meeting, Trustee Benoit sought to "motion for a new policy" which she delivered by email to Chair DiLorenzo on April 25, 2023 with a request that the Policy be added "to the agenda" for the May 23, 2023 Board meeting.

The Policy provides that employees "shall not advocate" concerning any partisan, political, or social policy issue. Advocacy is defined in the Policy to include "the use of speech, conduct, or symbols to support or oppose a particular point of view or belief about partisan, political, or social policy issues or matters."<sup>19</sup> The Policy specifically refers to the prohibition on displaying "any flag" among other symbols "that advocates concerning any partisan, political, or social policy issue" though it provides exemptions for the Canadian, Ontario, Catholic, and Vatican flags, in addition to the flags of other countries or Canadian provinces and territories "when directly relevant to a course of study in a social studies or foreign language class."<sup>20</sup> Under the heading "Delegation of Responsibility," the Policy specifies that when implementing and enforcing the Policy, "all flags that have not been mentioned as permitted by the [B]oard" should be kept off school property.<sup>21</sup> While the Policy does not refer explicitly to the Pride flag, it is accepted that if the Policy was adopted, the Pride flag would not be flown at the Board.

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<sup>19</sup> See Appendix G: Policy Proposed by Trustee Benoit titled "Partisan, Political, or Social Policy Advocacy Activities" (The "Policy"), page 1, "Definitions."

<sup>20</sup> See Appendix G: The Policy, page 3.

<sup>21</sup> See Appendix G: The Policy, page 4

It was certainly the impression of Trustee Turner that the significance of considering the Policy at the May 23, 2023 meeting was to avoid the flying of the Pride flag and during her interview, Trustee Benoit acknowledged that the public support for the Policy on May 23, 2023 was focused on its adoption to prevent the Pride flag from flying during the month of June.<sup>22</sup>

Per the By-Laws Policy, Governance Policy No. 1001. (the “Bylaws”), the most recent edition of “Robert’s Rules of Order” shall govern motions and debates.<sup>23</sup> Per subsection (c) of Bylaw 21 “[a] Notice of Motion shall not be discussed or seconded at the meeting at which it is initially presented.”

Trustee Benoit’s Policy Request was initially presented at the May 23, 2023 Board meeting. During that meeting all of the Trustees were in attendance, with the exception of Chair DiLorenzo who is marked in the Minutes as having been “Excused.”<sup>24</sup> In Chair DiLorenzo’s absence, Vice-Chair Burkholder chaired the meeting, with Trustee Huibers, a former Chair of the Board, sitting in as Vice-Chair.

All interviewees acknowledged that there were a large number of people in the gallery during the meeting that night. Trustee Benoit’s evidence is that they came because they understood Trustee Benoit’s Policy would be discussed. When asked how people knew to attend, Trustee Benoit stated that she told Ms. Pierre from PAFE about the motion, who may have told people to attend.<sup>25</sup>

Trustees Turner, Huibers, and Burkholder advised that, other than meetings where awards are being given or where delegations are being made, the Board meetings do not draw significant crowds.<sup>26</sup> Each interviewee used different language, but agreed that the persons in the gallery that evening were animated.

During her interview, Trustee Benoit confirmed that she was advised that the motion would be “presented” on May 23, 2023. It is clear that Trustee Benoit did not understand what ‘presenting a motion’ meant in accordance with the Bylaws. Trustee Benoit understood the Bylaws to say that “it [the motion] has to be submitted a month in advance and if submitted on April 24, 2023, it would have been on the May meeting agenda.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> See Appendix A3: Trustee Benoit Statement, page 8


<sup>23</sup> See Appendix I: Board By-Laws Policy, Bylaw 21. Motions and Debate

<sup>24</sup> See Appendix J: Minutes of the Board Meeting on May 23, 2023, page 1

<sup>25</sup> See Appendix A3: Trustee Benoit Statement, page 5

<sup>26</sup> See Appendix A6: Trustee Burkholder Statement, page 3; See Appendix A5: Trustee Huibers Statement, page 3; See Appendix A2: Trustee Turner Statement, page 3

<sup>27</sup> See Appendix A3: Trustee Benoit Statement, page 3



As she submitted the motion to Chair DiLorenzo on April 25, 2023, she understood that the motion would be put to the Board on May 23, 2023 and voted on. According to Trustee Benoit:

Yes, I did [submit it by email]. ... I understood it [the Bylaws] differently. I am new and have never done this before. I understood that the motion had to be delivered a month before [it was discussed/voted on]. I didn't know that it would be 'presented' first [in that it would be included in the meeting package] and then Trustees would sit with it to be discussed at the next Board meeting. I thought when he [Chair DiLorenzo] said about presenting it that it would be presented on May 23, 2023, and we would be voting on it.<sup>28</sup>

Trustee Benoit confirmed that during the May 23, 2023 meeting, once she was told that the Bylaws required the vote on the Policy to be deferred to the June 2023 Board meeting, she requested the Bylaws to be suspended:

When I found out [the Motion] was going to be discussed in June 2023, I asked to suspend the Bylaws temporarily and there was a majority that said no, which is understandable because you want to be able to digest things. So that's how that went in the [May 23, 2023] Board meeting.<sup>29</sup>

During the interview, the Investigator reviewed Bylaw 21(c) together with Trustee Benoit who acknowledged that she was unaware of the Board's process as described in the Bylaws on the evening of May 23, 2023.

The Bylaws require a vote of three-quarters of the members present in order to be temporarily suspended.<sup>30</sup> Per the Minutes from the May 23, 2023 Board meeting, the majority of Trustees voted against Trustee Benoit's request to suspend the Bylaws.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> See Appendix A3: Trustee Benoit Statement, page 3

<sup>29</sup> See Appendix A3: Trustee Benoit Statement, page 4

<sup>30</sup> See Appendix I: Board By-Laws Policy, Bylaw 20, Rules of Order.

<sup>31</sup> See Appendix J: Minutes of the Board Meeting on May 23, 2023

## VIII. THE ALLEGATIONS

### A. COMPARING THE PRIDE FLAG TO THE NAZI FLAG

#### *a. Trustee Benoit did Compare the Pride Flag to the Nazi Flag*

Trustee Turner alleges that after the Board meeting on May 23, 2023, while standing on the steps of the Catholic Education Center, Trustee Benoit compared flying the Pride Flag to flying the Nazi flag.

Trustee Benoit does not deny having made a comment regarding the Nazi flag, but denies that she was comparing it to the Pride flag. Trustee Benoit acknowledged that in the context of discussing her proposed policy which sought ban partisan symbols at the Board, like the Pride flag, she made the following comment: "...any flag at all, like the Nazi flag, we don't want that either, right?"

According to Trustee Benoit, she was correcting Mr. Taras who had apparently asked her a question about the motion with respect to her Policy and the flying of the Pride flag. In response to Mr. Taras' question, which Trustee Benoit could not explicitly recall, she replied by correcting him and saying "it's not just the Pride flag, it was about any flag."<sup>32</sup> Trustee Benoit acknowledges that:

"[i]t wasn't a good idea to say Nazi flag... I was trying to give another example of a controversial flag that we don't want on the school that creates division. It was not in a comparison way, it was just stating that we don't want any flag."


Trustee Turner acknowledged that he was not in attendance when Trustee Benoit made this, or any other, comment captured by video after the Board meeting on May 23, 2023. Director Cipriano and Trustee Huibers similarly confirmed that they did not hear Trustee Benoit make the comment about the Nazi flag.

Trustee Burkholder did provide evidence that she heard Trustee Benoit comment on the Nazi flag and thought that Trustee Benoit was "being more flippant more than anything else." Trustee Burkholder did not know if Trustee Benoit had the recollection or historical knowledge to understand the comment. I do find it unusual that Trustee Burkholder heard the comment concerning the Nazi flag when the evidence is that she was only outside at the same time as Trustee Huibers and Director Cipriano, who both said they did not hear the comment.

Given that there is video evidence of this comment, it may simply be that Trustee Burkholder's recollection is unreliable, in that she is remembering the video of the statement

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<sup>32</sup> See Appendix A3: Trustee Benoit Statement, page 7



and not recalling having heard it in person. That, in my view, is of no consequence to the present allegation as there is video footage available through a video embedded in a news report from CHCH dated May 31, 2023 wherein a gentleman, who I understand to be Mr. Taras says “...up in June, or any flag ...” and at the same time, Trustee Benoit comments “...any flag at all, like the Nazi flag, we don’t want that either, right?”

During her interview, Trustee Benoit acknowledged that she made the comment and that her reference to the Nazi flag was in response to a comment about the Pride flag. In particular, she acknowledged that in identifying the Nazi flag, she was trying to give an example of “a controversial flag that we don’t want on the school that creates division.” I conclude that Trustee Benoit was drawing a comparison, despite her belief to the contrary, between the Nazi flag and the Pride flag, as both being controversial symbols. This is confirmed in her response to the question of *why* she chose to reference to Nazi flag:

It was just the first thing that came into my head as being something that was controversial that causes people to be upset and that was the example I was using to show that we don’t want any flag at all, maybe could have used an Anarchist flag or Chinese flag or whatever. I could have used a better example but that was the first thing that came to mind. For me stating that it was just about the Pride flag took away the message that I was trying to have in this policy which was creating a place of neutrality and respect for each other.

Trustee Benoit also explained that she was upset when people misunderstood her intention. Specifically, she says:

When I saw that they were saying “comparing,” I was really upset because that’s not what I was doing I was just saying any flag. I was just saying any flag, any flag at all, and everyone went off to say that I compared it and that’s not what I was doing. ... I am not coming after them or attacking a particular group. I just want to focus on education, beautiful Catholic education. Let’s just focus on what that means and not focus on personal belief or a symbol that not everyone agrees on. Everyone comes from different places and that is a truth or a fact. We don’t want anyone to feel left out. My intention was to focus on what we were here to do – to learn, not to focus on the upset that was causing the twisting of words.

While we accept that Trustee Benoit was not intending to be hurtful, in effect, Trustee Benoit was comparing the Nazi flag – as another example, *like the Pride flag* – that was controversial



and therefore – according to Trustee Benoit – not appropriately displayed at school. As a result, this allegation is substantiated.

***b. Trustee Benoit Violated the Code of Conduct***

The Nazi flag is a distinctly recognizable symbol of Nazi propaganda. It is associated with the far-right dictatorial regime in power in Germany prior to and through the Second World War, which was characterized by its pursuit of racial “purity” pursued through policies designed to exterminate Jews and other minorities – including homosexuals – by mass murder, among other means. In modern times, it is associated with white-supremacist groups that have similar ideals for the exclusion – or worse – of minorities from various facets of society. It is commonly associated with hate and the intolerance or exclusion of minorities across protected grounds, including sexual minorities.

To the contrary, the Pride flag, which can be represented in a number of different ways, but which always reflects in essence a rainbow, is born out of an intention to include persons historically marginalized in society. It represents support for, and recognition of, LGBTQ2SIA+ persons and has evolved over the years as society has evolved to be more inclusive and recognize the diversity of persons who are not cis-gendered and heterosexual.

We have considered the issue from the perspective of whether the comment made by Trustee Benoit is consistent with the Code of Conduct, and in particular, her obligation to:

- create a positive environment that is safe, harmonious, comfortable, inclusive and respectful;
- be respectful of other Trustees, the Director of Education, staff, students, all members of the Niagara Catholic community, as well as the public;
- respect and comply with all applicable federal, provincial and municipal laws (which, in our view includes the Ontario Human Rights Code);
- respect and treat others fairly, regardless of, for example, race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, or disability;
- carry out her responsibilities in a manner that assists the board in fulfilling its duties under the *Education Act*... including but not limited to the board’s duties under section 169.1;<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> We note that section 169.1(1) of the *Education Act*, sets out the following:

**169.1** (1) Every board shall,

(a) promote student achievement and well-being;

- maintain focus on student achievement and well-being.

As concluded above, Trustee Benoit does not deny making the comment about the Nazi flag, and despite her interpretation to the contrary, we conclude that her comment did, in fact, draw a comparison between the Pride flag and the Nazi flag. In conflating the controversy allegedly associated with the flying of the Pride flag – a symbol of inclusion and support – with the controversy associated with the Nazi flag – a symbol of hate and violence – Trustee Benoit, as a member of the governing body of the Board, did not demonstrate support, inclusion, or an understanding for the experience of the historically marginalized place students from the LGBTQ2SIA+ community (and their families) face in society and within the Catholic school system more specifically. While there is no definition of discrimination in the Code of Conduct or the Ontario *Human Rights Code*, *prima facie* discrimination will be found where:

1. A person or group of people have a characteristic protected from discrimination;
2. They have experienced an adverse impact; and
3. The protected characteristic was a factor in the adverse impact.<sup>34</sup>

The analogy made by Trustee Benoit is offensive on its face and is directed toward persons based on their sexual orientation or gender expression, characteristics explicitly protected from discrimination under the Code of Conduct as well as the Ontario *Human Rights Code*. Trustee Benoit's comment is discriminatory.

In considering this issue, we have also considered the jurisprudence arising out of the *Human Rights Code*, and in particular, its prohibition on the creation of a poisoned environment.

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- (a.1) promote a positive school climate that is inclusive and accepting of all pupils, including pupils of any race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, marital status, family status or disability;
  - (a.2) promote the prevention of bullying;
  - (b) ensure effective stewardship of the board's resources;
  - (c) deliver effective and appropriate education programs to its pupils;
  - (d) develop and maintain policies and organizational structures that,
    - (i) promote the goals referred to in clauses (a) to (c), and
    - (ii) encourage pupils to pursue their educational goals;
  - (e) monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of policies developed by the board under clause (d) in achieving the board's goals and the efficiency of the implementation of those policies;
  - (f) develop a multi-year plan aimed at achieving the goals referred to in clauses (a) to (c);
  - (g) annually review the plan referred to in clause (f) with the board's director of education or the supervisory officer acting as the board's director of education; and
  - (h) monitor and evaluate the performance of the board's director of education, or the supervisory officer acting as the board's director of education, in meeting,
    - (i) his or her duties under this Act or any policy, guideline or regulation made under this Act, including duties under the plan referred to in clause (f), and
    - (ii) any other duties assigned by the board.

<sup>34</sup> *Moore v British Columbia (Education)*, 2012 SCC 61 cited in *RB v Keewatin-Patricia District School Board*, 2013 HRTO 1436 at paragraph 204.

While a poisoned environment most often arises in the context of employment, the Divisional Court in *City of Toronto v Josephs*, 2018 ONSC 67 (“*Josephs*”) made clear that it is possible in a service context to have one egregious incident or a pattern of conduct sufficient for a finding of a poisoned environment.<sup>35</sup> Consistent with human rights legislation, the creation of a poisoned environment can be reflected in comments or conduct, that is likely to offend, hurt, or humiliate a person who differs from others on the basis of a prohibited ground – here sexual orientation and gender expression. This conduct has been described as “an abuse of authority” that “constitutes a profound affront to the dignity of the [persons] forced to endure it.”<sup>36</sup>

While making a specific finding of a poisoned environment is beyond the scope of this investigation, in our view analogizing the symbol of Pride with the Nazi symbol is an affront to the dignity of all persons the Pride flag represents and when communicated by a person with governing authority, it does negatively impact students and/or staff inclusion in the environment in which these persons are supposed to work and learn.

The Code of Conduct requires that Trustees “must... respect and treat others fairly, regardless of, for example, ... gender, sexual orientation...”. It also requires Trustees to comply with the *Education Act* and specifically to carry out their responsibilities in a manner that assists the board in fulfilling its duties under section 169.1, which provides, among other things that:

**169.1** (1) Every board shall,

(a) promote student achievement and well-being;

(a.1) promote a positive school climate that is inclusive and accepting of all pupils, including pupils of any race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, marital status, family status or disability;

(a.2) promote the prevention of bullying;

Having concluded that Trustee Benoit’s comment was discriminatory, we conclude that it violates the Trustee Code of Conduct in that it did not reflect respect for or promote a positive school climate that is inclusive of LGBTQ2SIA+ students and staff of the Niagara Catholic District School Board. It similarly violates the Trustee’s obligation to promote student well-being.

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<sup>35</sup> see *Josephs*, at paragraph 29.

<sup>36</sup> See *Dhanjal v Air Canada*, (1996), 28 CHRR D/367 at p. 49 (CHRT) quoting *Janzen v Platy Enterprises Ltd* [1989], 1 SCR 1252, 1989 CanLII 97 (SCC).

I pause here to note that Trustee Turner acknowledged that there is a point at which the support for the LGBTQ2SIA+ could conflict with the Catholic teachings. While not explicitly stated, it is apparent that Trustee Benoit views the flying of the Pride flag as inconsistent with Catholic education.

It is not a part of this investigation to consider or determine whether supporting LGBTQ2SIA+ persons or the flying of the Pride flag is consistent with the teachings of the Catholic Church. I note, however, that courts have concluded that there is no unfettered authority under section 93 of the *Constitution Act, 1867*, for Catholic School Boards to do “whatever they like on any matter” even if Catholic teachings are implicated.<sup>37</sup>

In the present case it is of note that the Code of Conduct contextualizes the responsibility of Trustees to provide the best possible Catholic education “within the duties prescribed in the *Education Act*, its Regulations, and other applicable legislation...”. Further, on its face the Code of Conduct requires trustees to treat students with respect regardless of their sexual orientation and gender expression, consistent with the language of section 169.1 of the *Education Act* and section 1 of the *Human Rights Code*. Trustee Benoit’s comments violated this responsibility, and in coming to that conclusion it is not necessary for us to address the tension, if any, between the Catholic teachings and the Board’s decisions when it comes to supporting the LGBTQ2SIA+ community.

**B. MISREPRESENTING THE BOARD PROCESS, ENCOURAGING PEOPLE TO REMOVE THEIR KIDS FROM THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL BOARD & SPEAKING ON BEHALF OF THE BOARD**

***a. Trustee Benoit misrepresented the Board’s Process on May 23, 2023***

Trustee Turner alleged that when she made comments on the steps, Trustee Benoit provided wrong information to the people present. In particular, she did not accurately explain the Board’s process and why the motion to vote on her Policy had been deferred to the next meeting. Moreover, Trustee Turner alleges that Trustee Benoit improperly described the Board’s process during the May 23, 2023, meeting as Trustee Benoit and/or her supporters “being railroaded” by the rest of the Trustees who did not agree to vote on the Policy without more time to consider it. According to Trustee Turner the Board’s unwillingness to discuss the Policy was not only consistent with its process set out in the Bylaws but also necessary to afford Trustees the necessary time to process the Policy and discuss it at the next meeting.

Trustee Benoit said that when making comments on the steps outside the Board office, the only thing she said regarding what happened at the meeting on May 23, 2023 was that that Policy Request “was on the agenda for May 23, 2023, but ... that it would be for [the Board

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<sup>37</sup> *Hall (Litigation guardian of) v. Powers*, 2002 CanLII 49475 (ON SC) at paragraph 41.

meeting on] June 20, 2023 to be discussed.”<sup>38</sup> In response to our questions about her comments concerning the Board’s process Trustee Benoit stated that she could not recall much but she acknowledged that she did not explain that the outcome of the meeting was as a result of the Board following its process as set out in the Bylaws.<sup>39</sup> Her evidence is that she addressed the people saying something to the effect that “I just thought it [the Policy] was going to be something to present this evening but that’s not the case, but I need your support so please come out on June 20.” She denied that she said or intimated that she was “railroaded” during the meeting on May 23, 2023, but could not remember if she made any comments about the Board’s process that evening, She said that she was “overwhelmed, and ... trying to do my best but at the same time I was sensing the emotion of people who wanted it to be discussed before June 1 and just encouraging them to come out on June 20.”<sup>40</sup>

As noted above, Trustee Benoit confirmed during our interview that she delivered the Policy Request to Chair Danny DiLorenzo on April 25, 2023 *after* the April 2023 Board meeting.<sup>41</sup> She explained that because her request was delivered a month in advance, she thought that it would be presented at the May Board meeting.<sup>42</sup>

During our interview with Trustee Benoit, we reviewed the Board’s Bylaws as they pertain to the consideration of motions. In particular, we looked at Bylaw 21(c), which provides that “[a] Notice of Motion shall not be discussed or seconded at the meeting at which it is initially presented.” She acknowledged that she was unaware of how the Bylaws applied to her request to have the Board consider the Policy at the May 23, 2023 meeting and said during the course of our interview that “I agree that this [section 21(c) of the Bylaw] was something I didn’t see and was a misunderstanding or misstep in my case in terms of understanding how the procedure goes.”<sup>43</sup> According to Trustee Benoit, when she found out that the Policy would be considered at the next Board meeting in June 2023, she asked to suspend the Bylaws temporarily to consider the Policy sooner, which request was rejected by the majority of Trustees. Trustee Benoit’s evidence during our interview was that she understood their rejection to be “because you want to be able to digest things.”<sup>44</sup>

Both Trustee Huibers and Trustee Burkholder provided evidence that they were outside when Trustee Benoit was making comments to a group of people. Both provided evidence that Trustee Benoit agreed with a comment that the Board “railroaded” Trustee Benoit and

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<sup>38</sup> See Appendix A3: Trustee Benoit Statement, page 8

<sup>39</sup> See Appendix A3: Trustee Benoit Statement, page 9


<sup>40</sup> See Appendix A3: Trustee Benoit Statement, page 9

<sup>41</sup> See Appendix F: Email from Trustee Natalia Benoit to Chair DiLorenzo dated April 25, 2023, with Policy Enclosed

<sup>42</sup> See Appendix A3: Trustee Benoit Statement, page 3

<sup>43</sup> See Appendix A3: Trustee Benoit Statement, page 3

<sup>44</sup> See Appendix A3: Trustee Benoit Statement, page 4



the Policy at the meeting.<sup>45</sup> In particular, according to both Trustees, there was someone in the crowd asking questions and making comments to Trustee Benoit, including a comment to the effect that “they were here to railroad you”<sup>46</sup> referring to the Board’s conduct that evening. Trustees Huibers and Burkholder provided evidence that Trustee Benoit agreed with the comment. Director Cipriano did not recall hearing any specific comments made by Trustee Benoit but did go outside out of a concern that Trustee Benoit was making comments in her capacity as a representative of the Board. More is said about that below.

Having considered the fulsome evidence, we conclude that on a balance of probabilities Trustee Benoit did speak to a crowd outside the Board office and did misrepresent what happened at the Board meeting on May 23, 2023.

In coming to this conclusion, we note that Trustee Benoit initially said she did not say “railroaded” and then said that she did not remember saying “railroaded” to describe the events that evening.

On balance, I prefer the evidence of the three other Trustees, two of whom were there. First and foremost, Trustee Turner was cautious in his interview not to exaggerate or overstate Trustee Benoit’s behaviour. He was thoughtful and not only circumspect in his criticism, but conscientious about providing context for *why* he had concerns. With that in mind, I find it more likely than not, that when he reviewed the YouTube video, he heard Trustee Benoit suggest that the Board “railroaded” her and/or the Policy that evening. This is also corroborated by Trustees Huibers and Burkholder who independently provided evidence that they heard Trustee Benoit affirm or endorse a comment from the crowd that they had been railroaded by the Board that evening. We do not find the distinction of whether Trustee Benoit explicitly said the phrase or agreed with the comment from the crowd to be of any meaningful distinction. Of import is that Trustee Benoit did not correct the notion that the Board’s decision that evening to follow its process and consider the Policy at the June meeting, was intentionally obstructive or inappropriate. Trustee Benoit herself acknowledges that she did *not* explain that the Board’s decision to consider the Policy in June ought to have been expected as it was entirely consistent with its Bylaws. This is further consistent with the uncontroverted evidence that she was not aware of the Board’s Bylaws and how they applied to her request to consider the Policy after its submission to Chair DiLorenzo on April 25, 2023.

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<sup>45</sup> See Appendix A5: Trustee Huibers Statement, page 8 and Appendix A6: Trustee Burkholder Statement, page 4

<sup>46</sup> See Appendix A6: Trustee Burkholder Statement, page 4

***b. Trustee Benoit did Support Parents Removing their Children from the Catholic Church***

Trustee Turner's evidence is that he recalls, both during the meeting and on the YouTube video of Trustee Benoit's comments, hearing parents say something to the effect of "we're taking the kids out of this school board." Trustee Turner's evidence is that on the video, Trustee Benoit replied affirmatively, saying something like "ya, do that."<sup>47</sup>

Trustee Benoit does not deny that she responded supportively in response to a parent who asked "should I be taking my child out of the school... I don't believe in what they are doing...".<sup>48</sup> It is clear from the context, that what the Board was doing related – at least in part - to its decision to fly the Pride flag. In replying "ya, ya" Trustee Benoit explained that she was supporting the parent's right to take care that suitable Catholic education is provided to their child. Trustee Benoit's evidence is that:

It wasn't to take away what our [School] Board is but to confirm her [the parent's] rights under the teachings of the Catholic Church. Of course, I'm supportive of every student but this was just a question seeking an affirmation that she [the parent] would be doing the right thing if she took her student out. This is her right as a parent and consistent with the teachings in the Catholic Church. I was just affirming her right of choice. I was not saying that I'm not supportive of or taking into account every student, even LGBTQ+ students. If I had a question about supporting, all students I would have supported all students. In that case, I was supporting her in affirming her beliefs in being a Catholic.

Trustees Huibers and Burkholder also provided evidence that Trustee Benoit was saying to pull kids from the school Board.<sup>49</sup> As noted above, Director Cipriano did not recall any of the specific comments made by Trustee Benoit while he was outside with her.

While Trustee Benoit did not concede any impropriety in her behaviour, she acknowledged that she replied "ya, ya" in response to a question from a parent as to whether they should remove children from the Board. While the specific language used by Trustee Benoit cannot be determined, we conclude that Trustee Benoit was supportive of the members of the crowd suggesting they should remove their children from the Board due to the Board's support of flying the Pride flag.

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<sup>47</sup> See Appendix A2: Trustee Turner Statement, page 9

<sup>48</sup> See Appendix A3: Trustee Benoit Statement, page 9

<sup>49</sup> See Appendix A5: Trustee Huibers Statement, page 7 and Appendix A6: Trustee Burkholder Statement, page 7

***c. Trustee Benoit was Speaking About Board Decisions in her Capacity as Trustee of the Niagara Catholic District School Board Without Authorization***

Trustee Turner stated that Trustee Benoit should not have been making comments about the Board's process or decision, as that is the role of the Chairperson or the Director of Education. Trustee Turner emphasized that the Board is supposed to be unified in its message, meaning that "Trustees are supposed to work together regardless of how they vote and if you vote against [a matter] you are still part of an entity...".<sup>50</sup> Trustee Turner's evidence is that Trustee Benoit spoke out in a public setting and that she "supported the group [of people outside the Board office] in every way when speaking to [them], she was giving them what they wanted to hear and maybe what she [personally] believed, but it was inappropriate."<sup>51</sup>

Trustee Benoit denied that she was speaking for the Board, reiterating that she was just telling the people outside the Board's office to come out on June 20 and responding, on behalf of herself, when asked questions from parents. Trustee Benoit acknowledged that at one point Director Cipriano and Trustees Burkholder and Huibers asked to speak with her but said that she did not "know what they wanted to talk to me about, not really...".<sup>52</sup> She explained that she was not comfortable going with them on her own, so she did not.

Trustee Huibers said that when he walked out and saw Trustee Benoit address the crowd, she was "holding court talking about things we [Trustees] are not allowed to... about things in her role as a trustee...".<sup>53</sup> Trustee Huibers said that as trustees, there are two options if you disagree with a decision that has been made by the Board "- say nothing or resign." Trustee Benoit - after a decision of the majority of the Board had been made - "was speaking as the elected official in her capacity as a Trustee of the School Board... [and making comments] around *not* supporting the decisions the Board has made in the past and [she was suggesting that] by not allowing this to happen - her motion - we [the other Trustees] were somehow not fulfilling our duties."<sup>54</sup>

Trustee Burkholder described Trustee Benoit's conduct as "grandstanding" and addressing a crowd in a manner that turned the conversation "into an us against them and [Trustee

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<sup>50</sup> See Appendix A2: Trustee Turner Statement, page 9

<sup>51</sup> See Appendix A2: Trustee Turner Statement, page 9

<sup>52</sup> See Appendix A3: Trustee Benoit Statement, page 12

<sup>53</sup> See Appendix A5: Trustee Huibers Statement, page 6

<sup>54</sup> See Appendix A5: Trustee Huibers Statement, page 6



Benoit] was saying the Board wasn't complying with a motion she felt she had put forward."<sup>55</sup>

Director Cipriano explained that he did not hear Trustee Benoit speak outside until he went out to speak with her about making comments on behalf of the Board. His evidence is that he may have heard her speak after he went outside but did not listen as a lot of people were yelling and his attention was divided.<sup>56</sup>

As noted above, we do not have the video recording of Trustee Benoit's comments to the crowd outside of the Board's office. The YouTube video referred to us by Trustee Burkholder does show Director Cipriano, with Trustees Burkholder and Huibers nearby, trying to speak to Trustee Benoit and records him advising her that the Bylaws only allow for the Chair of the Board to speak on its behalf. He can be heard saying, in part, "Natalia, I just want to be clear that our Bylaws only allow the Chair to speak on behalf of the Board. I just wanted to let you know that."<sup>57</sup>

Having considered the fulsome evidence, we conclude that a reasonable observer would not have considered Trustee Benoit to be speaking as an individual, but would have understood her to be commenting on the Board's decisions that evening in her capacity as a Trustee and representative of the Board.

Trustee Benoit acknowledges that she exited the Board's office, after a Board meeting, as a Trustee that members of the public were aware had put forward the Policy to purportedly be considered that evening. In that capacity she addressed the crowd to make comments about the Board's decision not to consider the Policy that evening, and its decision to discuss the Policy at the June meeting. We conclude that in addressing the Board's decision with the crowd outside the Board's office following the Board meeting, she was acting in her capacity as Trustee Natalia Benoit, a representative of the Niagara Catholic District School Board.

#### ***d. Trustee Benoit Violated the Code of Conduct***

In considering whether Trustee Benoit's behaviour complied with the Code of Conduct, we have considered that Trustees have the following responsibilities:

- To carry out the Board's responsibilities in a manner that assists the board in fulfilling its duties under the *Education Act*, the regulations and the guidelines issued under this *Education Act*, including but not limited to the board's duties under section 169.1.

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<sup>55</sup> See Appendix A6: Trustee Burkholder Statement, page 7

<sup>56</sup> See Appendix A4: Director Cipriano Statement, page 5

<sup>57</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9kMT33kC IE> at around 30 seconds into the video.

- To uphold the implementation of any Board resolution after it is passed by the Board.
- To avoid expressing comments, disagreement or speculation on the motives of a Trustee, a group of Trustees, or Board staff.
- To ensure that all information they communicate in the course of their duties is accurate and complete.
- To understand their role as a corporate body and the expectation that they may deliberate with many voices but must act as one.
- To accept that authority rests with the Board and that they have no individual authority other than that delegated by the Board.
- To refrain from speaking on behalf of the Board unless authorized to do so by the Board. The only official spokespersons for the Board are the Chair of the Board and the Director of Education.

Section 169.1 of the *Education Act* sets out a series of responsibilities a school board “shall” fulfill, which support a safe, inclusive, and effective learning environment for all students. For example, the *Education Act* requires school boards to promote student achievement and well-being, to promote a positive school climate that is inclusive and accepting of all pupils, to promote the prevention of bullying, to ensure effective stewardship of the board’s resources and to deliver effective and appropriate education programs.<sup>58</sup> The Board’s Code of Conduct requires each Trustee to work in support of these legislated responsibilities and makes clear that the support and promotion of Catholic education are to be fulfilled *within* the trustees’ duties under the *Education Act*.


Having concluded that Trustee Benoit spoke outside the Board’s office in her official capacity as a Trustee, we now consider whether her comments violated her duties under the Code of Conduct.

Trustee Benoit acknowledged that she did not explain the Board’s decision on May 23, 2023 as being consistent with its process under the Bylaws. We also find that she at minimum agreed with the characterization of the Board’s decision as having “railroaded” Trustee Benoit and her Policy. In failing to properly explain the propriety of the Board’s decision, and in affirming or supporting the notion that the Board acted improperly Trustee Benoit violated her duties:

- To avoid expressing comments, disagreement or speculation on the motives of a Trustee, a group of Trustees, or Board staff; and
- To ensure that all information they communicate in the course of their duties is accurate and complete.

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<sup>58</sup> see sections 169.1(1)(a)-(c).



Trustee Benoit did not accurately describe the Board's process which resulted in its decision to vote on the Policy at its June 2023 meeting. Trustee Benoit similarly did not explain that *had* it voted on the Policy at the May 23, 2023 meeting, the Board would have had to suspend the application of its Bylaws. Moreover, in failing supporting the notion that the Board acted improperly on May 23, 2023, Trustee Benoit clearly expressed her disagreement with the Board's decision to discuss her Policy at the June 2023 meeting.

Trustee Benoit encouraged a parent to remove their child from the Board, and in doing so did not comply with her responsibilities under the *Education Act*. In particular, she was not working towards building and promoting an inclusive and effective learning environment for all students. Rather, she was signalling to - if not agreeing with - the persons in front of her that the Board was not a suitable place for their children. In addressing a parent in her capacity as a Trustee, we consider whether Trustee Benoit violated her obligations under the Code of Conduct to support the Board, its learning environment, and its programs, and we conclude that she did.

Having concluded that, in addressing the Board's decision with the crowd outside the Board's office following the Board meeting, she was acting in her capacity as Trustee Natalia Benoit, a representative of the Niagara Catholic District School Board, we conclude that Trustee Benoit violated the following responsibilities of a trustee:

- To understand their role as a corporate body and the expectation that they may deliberate with many voices but must act as one.
- To accept that authority rests with the Board and that they have no individual authority other than that delegated by the Board.
- To refrain from speaking on behalf of the Board unless authorized to do so by the Board. The only official spokespersons for the Board are the Chair of the Board and the Director of Education.

Trustee Benoit did not seek, and did not receive, and authorization to address the crowd outside the Board office on May 23, 2023. We therefore conclude that Trustee Benoit violated the Code of Conduct when she spoke about the Board's deliberations, expressed her disagreement with the decision of the Board vis-à-vis her Policy, and failed to communicate accurate and complete information about the Board's process without authorization to do so.

## C. CREATING A CHAOTIC ATMOSPHERE THAT COULD PUT PEOPLE AT RISK

### a. *Trustee Benoit did not Create Chaos*

Trustee Turner’s evidence regarding the creation of chaos relates largely to events that post-date the Complaint, delivered on June 6, 2023. Specifically, he highlights the crowds present at the special meeting of the Board on June 7, 2023, and at the Board meeting on June 20, 2023. We have limited our investigation to the chaos purportedly caused as of the date of Trustee Turner’s Complaint. In that regard, Trustee Turner’s evidence is that the meeting on May 23, 2023, was attended by a large group of people vested in the Policy being adopted to prevent the Pride flag from being flown. Trustee Turner’s evidence is that people attending the Board meeting on May 23, 2023, were organized and not respectful. He said that he – and others – received spiteful comments to the effect that “you’re going to Hell,” “your life is a joke,” “quit your job,” and “you shouldn’t be a trustee.” According to Trustee Turner, members of the public were frustrated that evening, but he could not recall any of them acting out in a manner that led to them being asked to leave the meeting.<sup>59</sup>

Trustee Benoit denied that the atmosphere was chaotic at all. She acknowledged that people were yelling “so it required you to raise your voice” but she did not “recall anyone saying anything out of line.... it wasn’t pitchforks and stuff like that, it was people coming to pray in peace to that we don’t have these symbols coming in June.”<sup>60</sup> She said that she could sense the emotion of people who wanted the Policy to be discussed before June 1 and thought there was 10-15 people around her at the most. According to Trustee Benoit they were expressing disappointment at the Board but did not make anyone feel threatened.<sup>61</sup> Trustee Benoit’s evidence was that Director Cipriano advised her that there were people outside and that she could “go talk to them if [she] want[ed]...”.<sup>62</sup>

Trustees Huibers and Burkholder agreed that the Board meeting was well attended on May 23, 2023, which was unusual unless people are making a presentation or getting an award.

Trustee Huibers said the people in attendance were “very much against flying the Pride flag” and that they held up signs suggesting that “this was grooming youth, pedophiles, and some really unpleasant things.” According to Trustee Huibers, “there was some disorderly conduct that wouldn’t necessarily match what you would assume in a civil school board meeting – some comments and outbursts.”<sup>63</sup> Outside, Trustee Huibers thought there were maybe 50-100 people present, with 30-40 in Trustee Benoit’s immediate vicinity. Trustee Huibers stated that when Director Cipriano arrived, he “started to get shouted down...” so they decided to retreat because they thought “[t]he best course of action was to stop fanning the

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<sup>59</sup> See Appendix A2: Trustee Turner Statement, page 4

<sup>60</sup> See Appendix A3: Trustee Benoit Statement, page 12

<sup>61</sup> See Appendix A3: Trustee Benoit Statement, pages 9 and 12

<sup>62</sup> See Appendix A3: Trustee Benoit Statement, page 11

<sup>63</sup> See Appendix A5: Trustee Huibers Statement, page 3

fire and we were the tinder... [the crowd] continued to do the chanting, ranting and carrying on etc.”<sup>64</sup>

According to Trustee Burkholder – who chaired the meeting on May 23, 2023 - it was “a fairly full gallery and people were heckling in some sense” though she could not remember a specific word.<sup>65</sup> She did not remember anyone being violent or swearing but described them as “animated.” During the meeting, Trustee Burkholder’s evidence is that Trustee Benoit did not say anything to contribute to the emotion – it was the people in the gallery. Trustee Burkholder said that you could “feel the tension... everything felt heightened, everyone seemed a bit more anxious” but she did not feel threatened. Once outside, Trustee Burkholder said there was a smaller crowd than in the gallery, “maybe 20 left and now they knew they had an audience so everyone had something to say.”<sup>66</sup> According to Trustee Burkholder, there were about 40-50 people in the gallery during the meeting. Trustee Burkholder described the crowd as more “agitated” outside than they were inside, saying “it felt like an us and them... they were clearly upset and it’s clear that they were shouting and they wanted answers.”<sup>67</sup> She declined to describe the crowd or their presence as chaotic but said there were emotions which were directed toward the Trustees and the Director.

Director Cipriano denied advising Trustee Benoit that there was a group of people outside she could speak with. According to Director Cipriano, there was a large group in the gallery during the meeting and “it is common sense that they were going to make their way outside [after the meeting] because that is where the parking lot is.”<sup>68</sup> Director Cipriano described the group as “not happy...and they were going to talk about it.”<sup>69</sup> Director Cipriano agreed that there were about 50 people in the gallery, a majority of whom did not go directly to their cars after the meeting. When Director Cipriano took Trustee Benoit aside to speak to her outside, he thought there may have been 6-10 people around her. Director Cipriano characterized the atmosphere as hostile, saying they had expressed their disappointment at the decision concerning the Policy during the Board meeting and many were shouting at him outside when he walked out.<sup>70</sup>

Director Cipriano’s account was largely consistent with Trustees Burkholder and Huibers. Trustee Huibers perceived there to be many more people in attendance but Director Cipriano’s description of about 8-10 being in Trustee Benoit’s vicinity by the time Director Cipriano came outside with the Trustees is corroborated by the YouTube video of that part

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<sup>64</sup> See Appendix A5: Trustee Huibers Statement, page 10

<sup>65</sup> See Appendix A6: Trustee Burkholder Statement, page 3


<sup>66</sup> See Appendix A6: Trustee Burkholder Statement, page 5

<sup>67</sup> See Appendix A6: Trustee Burkholder Statement, page 6

<sup>68</sup> See Appendix A4: Director Cipriano Statement, page 3

<sup>69</sup> See Appendix A4: Director Cipriano Statement, page 3

<sup>70</sup> Appendix K: Email thread between Director Camilo Cipriano and Cenobar Parker re Follow-Up Question dated September 14, 2023



of the incident.<sup>71</sup> In addition to the voice of the individual taking the recording, you can hear Trustee Benoit, and her an individual named Jason who we believe to be Trustee Benoit's husband, and you can see a few others around them though the recording does not directly pan the audience to know if that is the extent of the crowd at the time. Moreover, voices are elevated, shouting, and it is clear that the crowd was disappointed in the Board's decision and were expressing as much to Director Cipriano primarily, but Trustee Burkholder as well. When Director Cipriano asks for people to leave, the recording suggests that they did.

Having considered the evidence together, including the video recording of the interaction between Director Cipriano and Trustee Benoit on the steps outside of the Board's office, we conclude that on a balance of probabilities Trustee Benoit did not – as of June 6, 2023 - create an atmosphere that was chaotic or could have put people at risk.

Everyone agreed that the crowd of people were disappointed and expressing the same by shouting and in some cases making negative comments to the Trustees and Director Cipriano. However, no one suggested that the crowd was threatening on May 23, 2023. Trustee Burkholder explicitly declined to describe the crowd as chaotic, and neither Trustee Huibers nor Director Cipriano described the situation in a manner that suggested they feared for themselves or others during the incidents. The people were emotional, however there is no evidence that they were out of control or that there was an imminent fear that they would get out of control. I say this with caution understanding that all the witnesses interviewed expressed a belief that the crowd *could have* escalated to that point and we understand that the tension did escalate leading to and during the June 20, 2023, meeting. On the evidence we do have of the atmosphere on May 23, 2023, we cannot conclude on a balance of probabilities that Trustee Benoit created a chaotic atmosphere at or after the Board meeting. Moreover, when it seems apparent that there were no more productive conversations to have that evening, Director Cipriano asked the crowd to disperse, and they did.

With the above in mind, we cannot conclude that Trustee Benoit's words or actions on May 23, 2023, created a chaotic atmosphere or that she knew or ought to have known that her words or actions put people at risk that evening. Given our conclusion in respect of this allegation, we do not consider whether creating a chaotic atmosphere or one which could have possibly put some individuals at risk would violate the Code of Conduct.

## **IX. CONCLUSION**

With the foregoing in mind, we conclude that Trustee Benoit did violate the Code of Conduct when she:

- Compared the flying of the Pride flag to flying the Nazi flag after the Board meeting on May 23, 2023;

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<sup>71</sup> <https://youtu.be/9kMT33kC IE>.

- Mischaracterized the events at the Board meeting on May 23, 2023, failed to acknowledge that the Board's decision was consistent with its process as set out in the Bylaws and implied that the Board acted improperly in waiting to vote on the Policy until June 2023;
- Supported a parent's comment that children should be removed from the Niagara Catholic District School Board; and
- Spoke publicly in a manner that could have been understood as speaking on behalf of the Board.

We have declined to find, on a balance of probabilities, that Trustee Benoit created a chaotic atmosphere or one that could have possibly put some individuals at risk at or immediately after the Board meeting, on May 23, 2023.

Thank you again for entrusting us with this important investigation.

Yours truly,



**Cenobar Parker**

Parker Sim LLP

**TO: NIAGARA CATHOLIC DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD  
BOARD MEETING  
JANUARY 30, 2024**

***PUBLIC SESSION***

**TITLE: DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION'S ANNUAL REPORT 2023**

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The Director of Education's Annual Report 2023 is presented for information.

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Prepared by: Camillo Cipriano, Director of Education/Secretary-Treasurer

Presented by: Camillo Cipriano, Director of Education/Secretary-Treasurer

Approved by: Camillo Cipriano, Director of Education/Secretary-Treasurer

Date: January 30, 2024





## **REPORT TO THE BOARD JANUARY 30, 2024**

### **DIRECTOR'S ANNUAL REPORT 2023**

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#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

In compliance with the Education Act, Section 283(3), the Chief Executive Officer of a Board is required to submit to the Board an Annual Report highlighting the action taken during the preceding 12 months. A copy of the annual report must be submitted yearly to the Minister of Education before January 31, 2024.

Niagara Catholic's 2023 Director's Annual Report fully complies with all information required by the Minister of Education.

The Ministry of Education expects that copies of the Director's Annual Report will be posted online for all stakeholders to easily access. The 2023 Director's Annual Report will be posted on the Board website and will also be linked to the Ministry of Education's website.

As we utilize our website to its fullest capacity, the 2023 Director's Annual Report will be available on the Board website as of Wednesday, January 31, 2024. A link to the Director's Annual Report section of the website will be provided to the following groups, individuals, and institutions, in addition to our Board of Trustees:

- Bishop Bergie and all Parish Priests in the Diocese of St. Catharines
- Principals, Vice-Principals and Administrators
- Niagara Catholic Parent Involvement Committee
- Special Education Advisory Committee
- Catholic School Council Chairs
- CUPE, OECTA Elementary and OECTA Secondary
- Local Members of Parliament (MP), Members of Provincial Parliament (MPP) and Mayors
- All Catholic School Boards in Ontario
- Institute for Catholic Education, OCSTA, CCSTA
- Other educational institutions
- Indigenous Education Advisory Committee (IEAC)
- Ministry of Education – London Regional Office

The Director's Annual Report 2023 is presented for information.

Prepared by: Camillo Cipriano, Director of Education/Secretary-Treasurer

Presented by: Camillo Cipriano, Director of Education/Secretary-Treasurer

Approved by: Camillo Cipriano, Director of Education/Secretary-Treasurer

Date: January 30, 2024

# Director's Report 2023



## Message from the Director

It's hard to believe that another year has come and gone.

After interrupted periods of learning, 2023 was a year that we were finally back to what most closely resembles normal. We had many wonderful events take place throughout the year: competitions, concerts, celebrations and tournaments.

I am grateful to everyone who worked so hard this year to ensure student success was top of mind. Every member of our team, from senior leadership to casual staff, focused on doing their very best to support students in every way possible. You are living embodiments of our mission, vision, and values, and that is what makes Niagara Catholic so special.

This 2023 Director's Annual Report showcases many of the wonderful things that have happened this year, and it is my honour to share it with you.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Camillo".

Camillo Cipriano,  
Director of Education, Niagara Catholic District School Board

# Trustees and Senior Administration

## CHAIR OF THE BOARD

Danny Di Lorenzo .....Fort Erie, Port Colborne, Wainfleet

## VICE-CHAIR OF THE BOARD

Rhianon Burkholder.....Thorold, Merritton

## TRUSTEES

Natalia Benoit .....St. Catharines, Niagara-on-the-Lake

Joe Bruzzese.....Niagara Falls

Larry Huibers.....St. Catharines, Niagara-on-the-Lake

Doug Joyner .....Grimsby, Lincoln, West Lincoln

Jim Marino.....Niagara Falls

Paul Turner .....Welland, Pelham

## STUDENT TRUSTEES

Charlotte Johnstone .....Saint Paul Catholic High School

Emilio Geremia .....Notre Dame College School

## SENIOR STAFF

Camillo Cipriano .....CEO/Director of Education & Secretary-Treasurer

Clark Euale .....Controller of Facilities Services

Julia Tiessen.....Executive Officer of Human Resources

Kim Kinney .....Superintendent of Education

Lee Ann Forsyth-Sells .....Superintendent of Education

Domenic Massi.....Superintendent of Education

Gino Pizzoferrato.....Superintendent of Education

Pat Rocca.....Superintendent of Education

Giancarlo Vetrone.....Superintendent of Business and Financial Services

Joseph Zaroda .....Superintendent of Education



## OUR MISSION

We are a  
**CHRIST-CENTERED**  
**CATHOLIC FAITH** community  
that **celebrates diversity**  
and fosters **SPIRITUAL GROWTH**,  
**inspiring ALL** to **REACH**  
their **FULL potential** in  
**MIND, BODY, & SPIRIT**

## OUR VISION

**ENCOUNTERING SOULS**  
AND  
**OPENING MINDS**  
so that **all students**  
**SUCCEED**

## OUR VALUES

ACCOUNTABILITY • COMMUNITY • COMPASSION • FAITHFULNESS • INTEGRITY • JUSTICE • STEWARDSHIP



# Faith Formation



This year, during Catholic Education Week, Niagara Catholic schools were challenged to plant mustard seeds and nurture their growth. Schools read the Parable of the Mustard Seed and learned how Jesus showed us how the Kingdom of God is like the smallest of seeds and when loved and nurtured, can grow to become the largest of shrubs. Mr. Oort's class at Lakeshore Catholic High School was able to grow the largest plant at 54 cm in our 30-day challenge.

Once again, Niagara Catholic had a large delegation attend the When Faith Meets Pedagogy conference in October. Four workshops were presented on behalf of our board. Highlights included a presentation of Food, Faith, and Wellness which saw one of our culinary teachers, the Religion and Family Life Consultant and Mental Health Lead present how we can easily embed our faith and mental wellness into high school courses such as culinary, tourism, and hospitality.

Before the conference, a delegation of Niagara Catholic high school students attended the Catholic Curriculum Corporation Youth Forum. Students attended talks and workshops where they learned about servant leadership and were empowered to be servant leaders in their school communities.

Also in October, the Niagara Catholic Faith Formation Committee was formed to plan faith formation events for Niagara Catholic staff. The committee is comprised of staff from across Niagara Catholic, including teachers, administrators, and support staff. An Advent staff faith formation event took place at the beginning of December, with a focus on preparing for the coming of Christ through the experience of Mary.

In November, more than 3,500 elementary students joined the Early Years Consultant and the Religion and Family Life consultant in a

virtual workshop with Karen Kiefer, the author of Drawing God. Students were able to listen to the author read her story and talk about where we see and encounter God in our daily life. Students' artwork showing where they have encountered God or how they see Him will be included in the upcoming art shows at the Catholic Education Centre.



Our Niagara Catholic Parent Involvement Committee had a focus on Cultural Approach to Education and brought in guest speaker Fr. Tony Ricard, a priest for the Archdiocese of New Orleans. Fr. Tony was the keynote speaker for the high school Culture of Life event where he and several of his students spoke about our value and identity as children of God.

A delegation from Niagara Catholic, which also included Bishop Bergie, attended the ICE Symposium On the Way where they were blessed to listen, learn, and reflect on adult faith formation to serve the needs of our Catholic school communities.

In 2023, more than 35 Niagara Catholic schools took part in the Development and Peace schools' programs. This program helps our schools engage social and global justice through the lens of our faith. The students were provided with world changing challenges where they can earn badges while learning more about the Catholic Social Teachings, the Catholic Graduate Expectations, and being better citizens for our world.



# Mental Health and Well-being

The Niagara Catholic Mental Health Team continues to focus on the importance of implementing a multi-tiered system of support for all students. This structure helps to establish priorities, clarify roles, and ensure service coordination and quality. In our last year of the Mental Health and Well-being Strategy 2021-2024, the annual action plan of activities was implemented in our schools, with some of these activities highlighted below.

As part of the Health and Physical Education curriculum, the Ontario government introduced mandatory mental health literacy modules for Grades 7 and 8 teachers and students, in collaboration with School Mental Health-Ontario. Our Mental Health Lead, Physical Education Consultant and Religion and Family Life Consultant were able to train all grade 7 and 8 teachers in mental health literacy and content related to mental illness, how to seek support, substance use, managing stress and self-care.

As part of an initiative to further develop the capacity of education staff in mental health, all elementary and secondary teachers participated in a half-day session focused on student mental health and well-being, delivered by our Mental Health Lead and social workers on two PA Days. These sessions emphasized mentally healthy classrooms and creating trauma-informed classrooms and schools. In addition, our

educators in the New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP) participated in suicide awareness training, and select staff participated in Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST).

As part of our goal to continue to intentionally connect faith and mental health; and recognizing that Catholic Education Week and Mental Health Awareness Week are aligned in Ontario, Niagara Catholic once again promoted both weeks, with the 2023 theme of Catholic Education Week, We are Many, We are One. Elementary and secondary students submitted more than 600 entries of artwork and videos for the annual competition to show how they can improve their spiritual and mental well-being, while participating in school-based activities to support the well-being of staff and students.

In 2023, our Child and Youth Worker team created new evidence-informed toolkits and programs. These resources focused on healthy relationships, mental health, wellness, empathy, and coping in our classrooms. Resources for mental health and well-being are accessible on the Board website [www.niagaracatholic.ca](http://www.niagaracatholic.ca) and for classrooms in the Niagara Catholic Virtual Learning Environment (NCVLE).

With all these additional roles and responsibilities, Social Workers continued to respond to the clinical needs of students, by providing therapy and counselling through a referral-based model.



# Equity, Diversity and Inclusion



In 2023, Niagara Catholic principals, staff and students participated in activities to increase awareness about equity, diversity, and inclusion. This is aligned with the Niagara Catholic 2021-2026 Strategic Plan, Listening, Learning and Leading, and the system priority, Foster Inclusive, Equitable and Safe School Communities Where all are Welcomed and Called by Name.

The Niagara Catholic Equity Action Plan 2023-2026 was created to ensure that all students will experience Catholic education through culturally relevant and responsive teaching, programs, resources, and supports for student success. All students will experience equitable and inclusive school and classroom practices to improve student achievement, engagement, representation, and voice. To support equity, diversity and inclusion in Niagara Catholic schools, data collected from EQAO, surveys, and parent/student/staff feedback will be used to guide the Board's strategic plan, board and school student achievement plans, math action plans, and Niagara Catholic's Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan. We will continue to offer staff professional learning about equity, diversity, and inclusive practices and programs, workshops on PA Days, and resources to support classrooms. Staff will also be invited to participate in the Board's voluntary workplace census.



## Black History Month

Niagara Catholic acknowledged Black History Month in Niagara Catholic schools with students, staff and families learning about the history, accomplishments, and contributions of Black Canadians. Resources were provided to all schools, including information about Black saints, Black history in the arts, and a variety of resources from School Mental Health Ontario. Principals and staff included the resources in classroom activities, participated in anti-racism workshops, and hosted guest speakers about the Black experience.

## Student Census

In the spring, Niagara Catholic conducted its mandatory student census with the goal of learning more about our students. This will help us identify and address systemic barriers to

student achievement and well-being. Twenty-six per cent of elementary students participated voluntarily with their families and 45 per cent of secondary students responded to the census questions. Eighty-four per cent of secondary students were born in Canada with 16 per cent born in other countries. The survey data helps our leadership team identify areas that require attention, develop a plan for improvement, and to measure our progress with identifying gaps in students' experiences and outcomes.

## Parent Engagement

The Niagara Catholic Parent Involvement Committee (NCPIC) hosted an in-person Faith Formation/Parent Engagement Event for Niagara Catholic parents and families with the theme of a Cultural Approach to Catholic Education at Denis Morris Catholic High School on May 3. The event featured guest speaker, Fr. Tony Ricard, a priest for the Archdiocese of New Orleans, Campus Minister at St. Augustine High School, Pastor of St. Gabriel the Archangel Parish, instructor of Church Doctrine and Youth Ministry for the Institute for Black Catholic Studies at Xavier University of Louisiana, and the Catholic Chaplain of the New Orleans Saints.

Fr. Tony's presentation addressed Catholic education from a cultural perspective to meet the needs of students and engaged all in attendance. He was accompanied by a team of students who shared their musical talents and their life stories. Parents/guardians also had the opportunity to participate in two workshops of their choice: Decodable Books, Math/Coding, Internet Safety, Pro Life, and Equity and Inclusion. Childcare was provided by secondary students who received Christian Community Service hours.

Catholic School Council Chairs and Co-Chairs attended the November 2023 NCPIC meeting. Superintendent of Education Kim Kinney presented the Niagara Catholic Math Achievement Action Plan to support student achievement in mathematics for K to 12 students. Lee Ann Forsyth-Sells, Superintendent of Education provided a presentation on the role and responsibilities of Catholic School Councils and Chairs/Co-Chairs.





# Indigenous Education

The past year was a time of change for Niagara Catholic's Indigenous Education Team. Gary Parker, a prominent Indigenous community member with an extensive background in working with Indigenous youth and Indigenous education, joined the board in the summer. His focus at Niagara Catholic is to help us continue to embed Indigenous culture and education in the K-12 curriculum. Since joining Niagara Catholic, he has worked diligently to implement the recommendations from the Truth and Reconciliation (TRC) as well as the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) Report*.

Cindilee Ecker-Flagg also joined Niagara Catholic in mid-2023 as the Indigenous Student Engagement and Success Coach. Her role is to support Indigenous students in the classrooms. She also supports educators who are integrating Indigenous curriculum into the classes as part of a full wrap-around service for students.

Indigenous students continue to be supported through our holistic approach to programs and services; while non-Indigenous students are supported through Indigenous education and resources that are shared by the Indigenous Education Team.

Indigenous student success continues to be the top priority for the Indigenous Education Team. Through the new hires and department realignment, Niagara Catholic has put programs and services in place to support our Indigenous students reaching their goals. The Indigenous Education Team continues to collaborate with community partners to support student success. These organizations provide services through their agencies and Niagara Catholic partners with them to roll out their programs and services.

Niagara Catholic continues to be active participants in the Indigenous Education Advisory Committee (IEAC). This committee includes local Indigenous agencies, spiritual leaders, elders, and knowledge keepers. The committee met four times in 2023 to get wisdom and guidance on how to do the best work for Indigenous students and awareness of Indigenous culture in our board.

Niagara Catholic invested a lot of time and resources in 2023 on embedding Indigenous education through the K-12 curriculum. The Indigenous Education Team took a lead role in this initiative, working with teachers to support them as they learn. Professional development sessions took place for principals, Senior Administrative Council, and trustees covering issues such as the Indian Act and Truth and Reconciliation. We will continue with this throughout 2024.

The Indigenous Education team added support through working with Dr. James "Niigaan" Sinclair. An Indigenous scholar and media personality, Niigaan is very well know Indigenous Scholar from the University of Manitoba. Dr. Sinclair worked with our Indigenous Education Team and has spoken to students, staff, our senior leadership team, and trustees. Dr. Sinclair provided professional development in the areas of the Papal Visit and its implications on our work as Catholic educators. His last visit with us was with the Niagara Catholics Board of Trustees, where he provided education in the areas of Indigenous Education with Catholic Boards and had very meaningful dialog with the trustees.

During Truth and Reconciliation Week, senior staff and trustees participated in a unity walk in Fort Erie. All Niagara Catholic secondary schools raised the *Every Child Matters* flag to honor Truth and Reconciliation Week.





# Student Achievement, Success, and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning

Niagara Catholic has been ambitious in our goal to increase student success in literacy and numeracy. We meet students where they are on their academic journey and walk with them as they work toward their full potential.

Success is measured in many different ways, from day-to-day classroom participation and tests, quizzes, and exams, to standardized testing.

Niagara Catholic exceeded the provincial average results in primary and junior reading, writing, and mathematics, Grade 9 mathematics and students writing the OSSLT for the first time.

Year over year, the 2022-2023 Grade 3 cohort increased the number of students who performed at or above the provincial level by six per cent (reading), three per cent (writing) and seven per cent (math). Grade 6 students met the 2022 EQAO results in reading and writing and showed an eight per cent increase in math.

We continue to work to improve Grade 9 test scores, which dipped by two per cent compared to the prior year.

Niagara Catholic's Grade 10 OSSLT success rate also increased year-over-year, with 86 per cent successfully completing the assessment on their first attempt, compared to 84 per cent in 2022. The Niagara Catholic Literacy Team continues its work with Student Support Services to make sure all students succeed.

Professional development for teachers was a strong focus for Niagara Catholic throughout 2023.

All principals, ERTs and K-2 teachers were trained on how to use the Universal Screener and how to understand the results. This training was provided in collaboration with the literacy team, the program resource teachers, and the speech and language pathologists.

We are in the process of implementing Multi-Year Reading Plans for K-2, grades 3-8, and Grade 9 to support student learning. Many afterschool professional learning sessions were offered on this topic and were very well attended.

Professional learning sessions were offered throughout the year to all secondary teachers of the *Contemporary Indigenous Voices*, Grade 11 English course. Many prominent Indigenous authors, whose books are featured within the course, led these sessions.



# Student Achievement, Success, and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning

## Multilingual language learners

Teachers who worked with students whose first language is not English participated in regular professional learning throughout the year.

The focus of these sessions was structured literacy, and were led by Dr. Doris Baker, Professor of Curriculum, Instruction, and Special Education at the University of Texas (Austin). Dr. Baker worked with our MLL team to design structured literacy programs that meet the needs of all English language learners in our system. Teachers worked with students and their families to create culturally responsive teaching materials, celebrating the diversity of our students. Our SWIS (Settlement Workers in Schools) team also worked with the MLL team to organize the Board's annual Newcomer Orientation Week, in cooperation with community partners.

Niagara Catholic is proud of our partnership with the Learning Disabilities Association of Niagara Region (LDANR). Our most recent collaboration offered the *Let's R.E.A.D.* program for grades two to four students. The program provided intensive and targeted instruction to each student to advance their literacy skills further. This program was offered at four Niagara Catholic elementary school sites across the region. It was a joint effort, with teaching shared by Niagara Catholic and an LDANR facilitator and volunteer (when available) at each site.

## Numeracy

Mathematics learning at Niagara Catholic has been focused on developing students' skills, understanding, reasoning and confidence. The professional learning for educators, including school leaders, is focused on the priority actions of the Ministry of Education. These priority

actions include ensuring teachers are working to the new curriculum; using high-impact instructional practices; engaging in ongoing learning to strengthen mathematics content knowledge for teaching; knowing the mathematics learner, and ensuring mathematical tasks, interventions and supports are relevant and responsive.

Our Math Achievement Action Plans reflect the planning, implementation and monitoring of these priority actions at the system, school and classroom level. Support for the use of digital math tools for students and families has been provided by the Ministry of Education. At Niagara Catholic, students in Kindergarten-Grade 10 have access to Knowledgehook at school and at home to support mathematics learning. This digital tool also provides educators with targeted materials for assessment and instruction.

## Ontario's new Holocaust curriculum

Niagara Catholic continues to offer professional learning opportunities to staff that align with provincial education priorities. In order to support teaching staff with the new learning on Holocaust education in the recently revised Social Studies curriculum, all educators were invited to participate in a virtual learning session with the Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center. This session provided knowledge of historical and contemporary issues of racism, antisemitism, and other forms of hate, along with tools to help teachers better address these topics in their classrooms. Further learning to support Grade 6 teachers with teaching Holocaust education was discussed and will continue over the next school year.





# Student Achievement, Success, and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning

## Advanced Placement

Niagara Catholic extended Advanced Placement programming to five Catholic high schools: Blessed Trinity, Holy Cross, Lakeshore Catholic, Notre Dame College, and Saint Paul. The program has proven to be very popular with students seeking out the opportunity to participate in the programs as soon as possible. It is open to all students who are willing and academically prepared to accept the challenge of AP's rigorous academic curriculum. Niagara Catholic believes that all students who meet the criteria should be considered for placement and is committed to ensuring students in the AP Program reflect the diversity in our schools.

## SHSM and Technology Programs

Niagara Catholic believes that there are multiple pathways to success for students. We offer a diverse range of technology-based programs for students, from those in the traditional skilled trades to programs in aesthetics, aviation, computer programming, and video production and continue to send the important message to students and families that careers in the trades are lucrative and fulfilling.

Throughout 2023, Niagara Catholic hosted or participated in many events to promote the skilled trades as viable career options, including skilled trade promotions nights at local high schools, career fairs, and job expos. We hosted the Trades Have No Gender conference in March, as well as a skilled trade symposium for Indigenous students.

We also hosted our annual Technology Skills Competition in March, which saw hundreds of secondary students participate in events at the local level before moving on to the provincial and national competitions later in the spring.

In the fall, Niagara Catholic technology students and staff attended the Level Up career fair in Hamilton, the Opportunity Knocks conference, the Aspire Farm to Fork Conference, the Women in Trades event with Niagara College, and hosted a Partners in Trades breakfast learning session with our partners in trades to ensure we maintain strong relationships industry leaders.

Niagara Catholic also announced two new dual-credit learning opportunities for students, in collaboration with Niagara College. Students in Grades 11 and 12 are now able to take courses in Early Childhood Education and healthcare through the college, earning credits toward their high school diploma, and their college program.



# Student Engagement

Throughout 2023, Niagara Catholic's elementary and secondary student senates worked to foster vibrant and inclusive school communities. They demonstrated commitment to enhancing the educational experience for all students through the diverse range of activities and leadership pursuits they created.

In February, the Secondary Student Senate played a key role in creating and hosting the Board's first prom for students in the Special Education program. The overwhelming success of this event has led to it being added to the board's annual event calendar.

The annual Student Leadership Symposium took place in April. The event focused on the themes of school spirit and leadership. It featured a keynote address by Dillon Mendes. Through a collaboration with the

Canadian Student Leadership Association, the symposium provided a space for student leaders to exchange ideas, share experiences, and develop essential leadership skills.

Senators participated in Ontario Catholic Student Youth Day in May, working with their counterparts across the province to discuss topics of interest to students in Catholic schools. The Senate also helped facilitate activities for our joint recognition of Catholic Education Week/ Mental Health Awareness Week.



# International Education

The International Education Program continues to be an important contributor to our shared goals of intentional inclusiveness and increased diversity in our schools. In 2023, 94 foreign students chose to study at a Niagara Catholic school for a semester or the full year. Sixteen of them graduated with an OSSD from one of our secondary schools.

These students from 17 countries truly enriched our system during their time with us as an international pupil and we look forward to continuing to educate those staying for the new year, while sending off with our blessings those whose time in Niagara came to an end.

Active recruitment of new students continued to take place and we look forward to providing a similar Niagara Catholic experience to new international students in the coming years.





## Adult and Continuing Education

Niagara Catholic's Adult and Continuing Education Centres continued to welcome newcomers to Canada throughout 2023. Niagara experienced a steady influx of adult newcomers to Canada especially in Niagara Falls. Niagara Catholic continued to support their varying English language needs and helped transition them to the Niagara region with the support of community partners.

Approximately 1,500 adult learners studied English as a Second Language (ESL) across the four main campuses and two satellite locations throughout the year. Through provincial and federal government support, Niagara Catholic was able to open additional classrooms to help shorten the waitlist.

Our Personal Support Worker Certificate program continued to meet the regional needs in long-term care facilities. With the support of the paid

tuition from the government, 34 PSW students graduated in 2023, and our program continues to grow to meet the local demand.

This 10-month program begins with four health and education courses. During this time, students receive their necessary certifications such as first aid, CPR, and their safe food handlers' certificate.

The second part of the program consists of three theory courses with simulation labs, one supervised placement at a regional home and 220 hours of cooperative education in a long-term care facility. This program is taught by a registered nurse who is also OCT certified. Personal Support Worker students can also use these credits toward the completion of their high school diploma. The job placement rate at the end of this program is very high.

## Alternative Education

Niagara Catholic offers two alternative learning sites for students. These sites provide students who struggle in a traditional classroom with a learning experience that better meets their needs.

Saint Kateri school offers students who have self-identified as Indigenous an alternative to learning in a traditional classroom. Students at Saint Kateri often explore the land and participate in traditional Indigenous learning, music, and arts and crafts, as well as their daily learning.

Pope Francis Catholic Secondary School is an alternative learning site for students from Grades 9 through 12. Students attend Pope Francis for a variety of reasons, such as attendance concerns, suspensions, mental health challenges, or are expectant/young parents.

Pope Francis teachers work with teachers from the students' home school to serve students' academic needs. They also work with community agencies to help promote student success.

## eLearning Program

Niagara Catholic has continued to grow its eLearning program to 47 course offerings for the 2023-24 school year. This program consistently reaches capacity based on the demand from students.

Our eLearning program continues to provide course options to help reduce timetable conflicts and to provide greater flexibility for our students.

Niagara Catholic's eLearning program partners with the Ontario eLearning Consortium and Catholic Virtual Ontario to better offer eLearning opportunities within the province.

Our eLearning students engage with students from Niagara Catholic and beyond, providing them with a diverse classroom and unique learning experiences.

Our Niagara Catholic students have embraced the eLearning opportunities and in 2022-2023 school year achieved a 97% success rate.

Our eLearning program continues to build capacity to support students through ongoing teacher training and support.

# Human Resources

Niagara Catholic's Human Resources Services Department had a very busy and fruitful 2023. Throughout the year, Human Resources Services staff worked to attract and retain new staff to the board, including elementary and secondary teachers, IT staff, and support staff, such as school secretaries, library assistants, and Facilities Services staff.

In August, Niagara Catholic held a very successful one-day hiring event at St. Anthony Catholic Elementary School. Nearly 130 people attended, and 86 people accepted jobs on the spot! We continue to attend employment events in Niagara and through Colleges of Education in Ontario and beyond to recruit new teachers to Niagara Catholic.

The Health and Wellness team put forward a number of various initiatives and communication tools. Some initiatives include the launch of the EFAP AP where staff can receive important information on the services and benefits of the employee assistance program from their mobile phones. We have also taken an intentional approach to ensuring employees receive important information on the valuable supports available to them. We also launched a sharepoint for leaders to help give training and reference tools to equip them as they lead their teams through every day challenges that may affect employee well-being. An employee sharepoint has been created for all staff to access as a one stop shop entry point to find information on a variety of topics affecting employee well-being.

One of the main wellness events this past school year included a challenge that resulted in over 400 employees joining together to travel to the North Pole and then around the world – twice! Each participant provided their daily activity time and at the end was entered to win a draw for a new apple watch.

The Health and Wellness team continues to expand services and offerings and looks forward to continuing this most important work in today's complex environment.

## Staff Development

In 2023, Staff Development continued to support a culture of professional learning that is fundamental to the success of every student. Professional Activity Days focused on mathematics, language, science, education technology, skilled trades and health and physical education.

Staff Development introduced the new Aspiring Leaders Program (ALP) to encourage future leaders from all job classes to grow within their roles and within the Board. This program featured a series of in-person, interactive sessions aimed at helping future leaders learn about themselves and essential leadership skills. The program was exceptionally well received and will return for 2024.

In addition, Staff Development provided privacy training to a variety of employee groups throughout the system





# Research & Privacy



## Research

Niagara Catholic accepts research applications from the community, individuals, and institutions to support student achievement and well-being. The research collaborations align with the priorities of the 2021-2026 Strategic Plan, Listening, Learning and Leading and are reviewed by the Board Research Ethics Review Committee. The collaborations provide professional learning opportunities for staff, while engaging students and families, on topics such as student achievement, school climate, and student mental health and well-being.

During the 2022-2023 school year Niagara Catholic engaged in research partnerships that were supported by system and school administrators and staff. These research collaborations have enabled Niagara Catholic staff to gain valuable insights and new perspectives to support promising practices to improve student outcomes and supports for families and the broader community.

## Privacy

Niagara Catholic is committed to protecting and safeguarding the personal information of staff and students. This objective, led by the Office of the Privacy Advisor has seen great progress throughout 2023. With the support of the Senior Administrative team, we have continued moving forward with our mandate of providing privacy training, awareness, education, and resources to Niagara Catholic staff.

As its third year as a department, the team's role in leading the privacy initiative has developed into one of oversight. Execution is achieved by taking a risk-based approach to privacy. The privacy team is a support and resource to all staff. In 2023, they experienced a significant uptick in the number of staff reaching out to our office with questions on privacy, a great indicator that privacy awareness is improving!

Niagara Catholic's privacy team meet regularly with peers across the province to discuss education-related privacy issues to help each other to continue moving forward. Their most significant achievement in 2023 was being the first Privacy Office in an Ontario school board to introduce online privacy training modules to staff. We began by introducing the modules to secondary teachers. Since then, elementary teachers, principals, vice-principals, school secretaries and support staff at our Catholic Education Centre have participated in privacy training.

The office is also responsible for Records Management. In this role, they continue to educate staff on proper records storage and management practices. Niagara Catholic now has a permanent, secure storage facility for inactive records.

Niagara Catholic also added a new permanent position to the team, through the Coordinator of Information Management, who provides leadership and support, specifically for Freedom of Information Requests and records management.



# Business and Financial Services

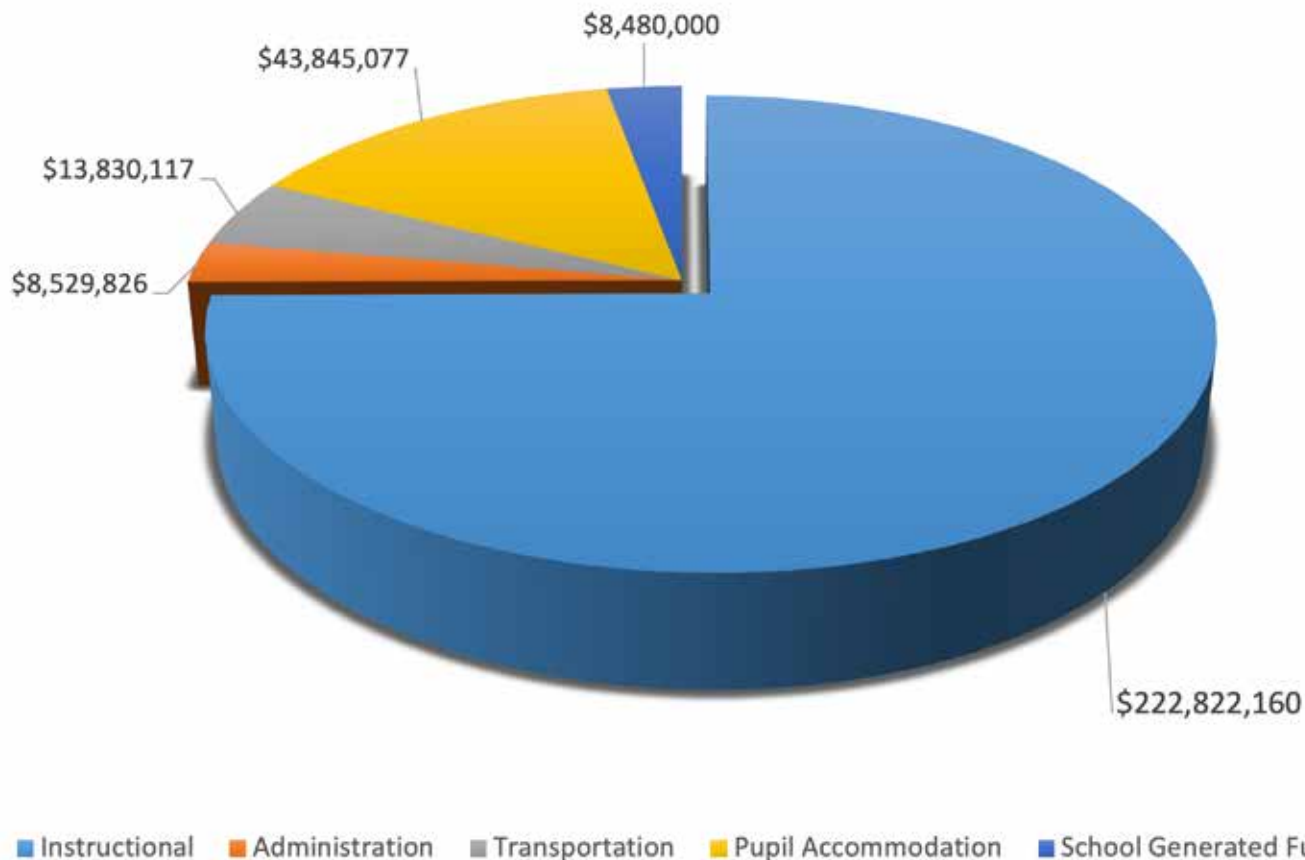
The Board's student-focused budget for 2023-2024 continues to demonstrate a commitment to fiscal responsibility and student achievement.

Niagara Catholic ensures our resources align with our Multi-Year Strategic Plan and Annual System Priorities. Developing an annual

operating budget is a collaborative process completed in consultation with trustees, staff, students, and system partners.

The estimated approved operating expenditure budget for 2023-2024 is approximately \$297,507,180.

## Operating Expenditures



# Facilities Services



Facilities Services continues to play a key role in ensuring our schools and grounds remain a safe and inviting place for the staff and students of Niagara Catholic. Our portfolio includes the operations, maintenance, capital planning, asset management, design and construction, project management, legislative compliance, planning and accommodations, security, childcare, community use and partnerships for 64 elementary, secondary, alternative learning and continuing education schools, as well as three administrative facilities, with a current replacement value of more than \$650 million and total building area of more than 2.5 million square feet.

In the fall, the Ministry issued its request for proposals for capital priority projects to school boards across Ontario. The Ministry has committed to notification of approved projects by March 2024. On behalf of Niagara Catholic, Facilities Services has submitted the following three proposals for consideration by the Ministry for capital priority funding:

- New Elementary School to be located in Niagara Falls, at Kalar Rd. and McLeod Rd.
- Expansion and renovations to Blessed Trinity Catholic Secondary School located in Grimsby. The expansion includes an 8-classroom addition, a new theatre, and a newly renovated technology area located within the existing school.
- An eight-classroom expansion at Saint Michael Catholic High School in Niagara Falls.

We are excited to report that the new St. Elizabeth CES in Wainfleet is scheduled to be completed during the 2024/25 school year.



# Facilities Services



We are also thrilled to report that our new elementary school located in Lincoln (Beamsville) is currently underway and in its design phase, with the start of construction planned for the summer of 2024. Completion is tentatively planned for the 2025/26 school year. Our Ministry approved budget for Facilities Services during the 2023/24 school year is \$16.8 million. The following are some of the investments implemented with this funding:

## Major Renovations to Secondary Schools including:

### **Holy Cross Catholic Secondary School:**

Accessibility upgrades to special education area; New Culinary Room ~ \$2.2 million

### **Denis Morris Catholic High School:**

Accessibility upgrades to single gym and change rooms ~ \$1.6 million

### **Saint Francis Catholic Secondary School:**

Accessibility upgrades to special education area ~ \$1.0 million

### **Blessed Trinity Catholic Secondary School:**

New artificial turf football/soccer field and running track ~ \$3.4 million

### **Notre Dame College:**

New artificial turf football/soccer field and running track ~ \$3.4 million;  
Accessibility upgrades in Auditorium and stage ~ \$4.5 million

### **Lakeshore Catholic High School:**

Upgrades to the administrative area ~ \$1.3 million

### **Saint Paul Catholic High School:**

Accessibility upgrades to special education area ~ \$1.0 million

## Major Renovations to Elementary Schools including:

### **Our Lady of the Holy Rosary Catholic Elementary School:**

Accessibility upgrades to special education area ~ \$2.2 million

### **St. Mark Catholic Elementary School:**

Kindergarten Room and Staff Room upgrades ~ \$550,000

### **St. John Bosco Catholic Elementary School:**

Exterior walls and entrance upgrades; window replacements ~ \$1.5 million

### **Our Lady of Fatima Catholic Elementary School:(SC):**

Window replacement and classroom upgrades ~ \$660,000

### **St. Kevin Catholic Elementary School:**

Library upgrade ~ \$170,000

### **St. Christopher Catholic Elementary School:**

Library upgrade ~ \$170,000

### **Kindergarten Playground Upgrades:**

St. Gabriel Lalemant, St. James, Sacred Heart, Assumption,  
St. Andrew, St. Christopher Catholic Elementary Schools ~ \$3.0 million

# Celebrations, Events, and Milestones

The first full year following the pandemic was an exciting one at Niagara Catholic. We were so thrilled to bring back events that had either been put on hold or held virtually during COVID. An overview of some of these events and activities that took place in 2023 is below:

Niagara Catholic hosted several events and activities throughout 2023, including the return to our Celebrating Excellence Awards, which spotlight the very best of our students, staff, and alumni. One elementary and secondary student from each school, and one student representing Adult and Continuing Education receives a Catch the Spirit Student Award of Excellence at the celebration. Staff are nominated by colleagues then selected for the Inspiration Award, and people who graduated from one of our high schools more than a decade ago are eligible for a Distinguished Alumni Award. This event is always a very special celebration of student, staff, and alumni success during Catholic Education Week.

This spring Niagara Catholic hosted the All-Access HOME (Helping to Open Minds Encounter) event, which focused on teaching students about accessibility. All-Access HOME was organized by Niagara Catholic's Accessibility Committee and staff in the Board's Special Education Services Department.

This pilot project, funded through The Ministry of Education's Supporting Students with Disabilities Grant, allowed for 49 elementary schools to send groups of Grade 7 and 8 students to the event.

The event included two parts: A presentation by Tracy Schmitt, known as Unstoppable Tracy, who shared her powerful story of overcoming obstacles to live her best life, and opportunities for students to learn about life with accessibility challenges. Unstoppable Tracy also visited secondary schools as part of this experience.

Unstoppable Tracy was back the following day along with recess expert Dr. Lauren McNamara, who speaks about the power of inclusivity in making our playgrounds safe and accepting spaces in a presentation to parents. This session showcased accessibility and The Recess Project, which has completed two playgrounds at Niagara Catholic schools.

Students who participated are now accessibility champions in their schools. A secondary event is planned for 2024.



# Celebrations, Events, and Milestones

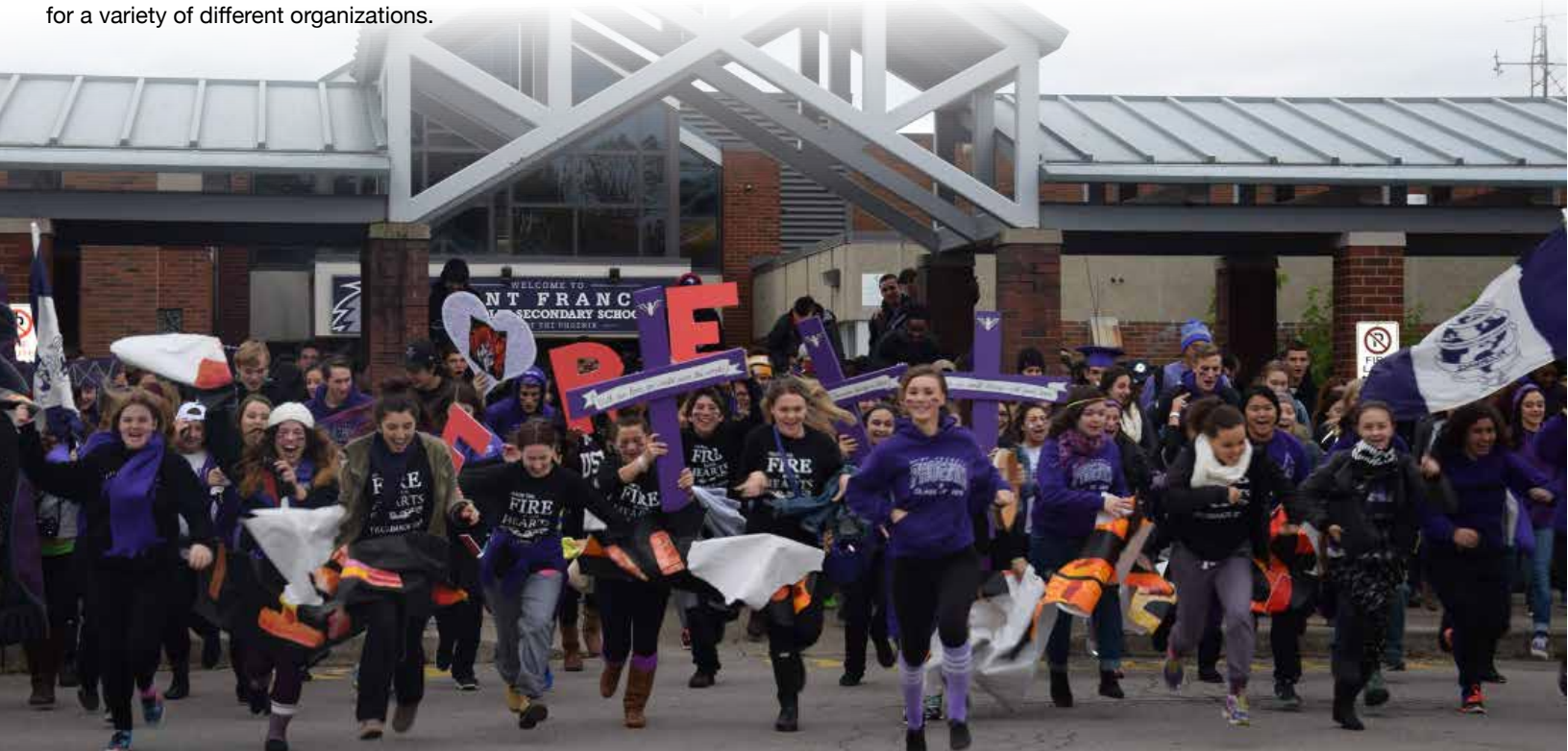
In September, Niagara Catholic launched a new newsletter for parents through our Communications Department: The Chronicle. Sent monthly to families, the Chronicle showcases news and events in our schools, and features articles about students, staff, and alumni. Its sister publication, The CommUNITY, a project led by Human Resources Services, launched in October. It focuses on news and events for staff, celebrates new hires and features important tips about employee benefits and health and wellness. Both publications have been very well received by our community.



Also in September, Niagara Catholic celebrated the 75th anniversary of Notre Dame College School, and the opening of the school's new turf field. The event was attended by hundreds of ND alumni, and the new turf field - named in honour of the Lacavera family, who have a long history at ND - was officially opened.



In October, Niagara Catholic hosted two very important annual events that support people in the developing world and in our community. Throughout October, Holy Childhood Walks took place at elementary schools across Niagara Catholic, raising more than \$40,000 evenly divided between the Holy Childhood Foundation and the Niagara Foundation for Catholic Education, and The Annual Pilgrimage which raised approximately \$100,000 for a variety of different organizations.





**TO: NIAGARA CATHOLIC DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD  
BOARD MEETING  
JANUARY 30, 2024**

***PUBLIC SESSION***

**TITLE: NIAGARA CATHOLIC GRADUATION RATES FOR THE  
2017-2018 GRADE 9 COHORT AS OF AUGUST 31, 2022**

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The Niagara Catholic Graduation Rates for the 2017-2018 Grade 9 Cohort as of August 31, 2022 report is presented for information.

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Prepared by: Lee Ann Forsyth-Sells, Superintendent of Education

Presented by: Lee Ann Forsyth-Sells, Superintendent of Education

Approved by: Camillo Cipriano, Director of Education/Secretary-Treasurer

Date: January 30, 2024





## REPORT TO THE BOARD

### NIAGARA CATHOLIC GRADUATION RATES FOR THE 2017-2018 GRADE 9 COHORT AS OF AUGUST 31, 2022

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Niagara Catholic District School Board, principals, vice-principals and staff, support all students from Kindergarten to Graduation (Grade 12), to become Niagara Catholic graduates, fulfilling the Mission, Vision and Values of the Board, the Board System Priorities, the Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations, and the Ministry of Education requirements.

In accordance with the 2021-2026 Strategic Plan, *Listening, Learning and Leading*, and the System Priority, “Advance Student Achievement for all Students”, focusing on student success, along with promoting and supporting all pathways for student achievement, this Board report highlights the Niagara Catholic four-year and five-year graduation rates as of August 31, 2022.

The four-year and the five-year graduation rate is calculated by measuring the percentage of students who graduated with an Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD) within four or five years of starting Grade 9.

To earn an OSSD before September 2024, students must:

- earn a minimum of 30 credits, including 18 compulsory credits, 4 Religious Education credits, and 8 optional credits
- meet the provincial secondary school literacy requirement
- earn at least two online learning credits, and
- complete 40 hours of Christian Community Service

The graduation rates are available on the Ministry of Education site at:

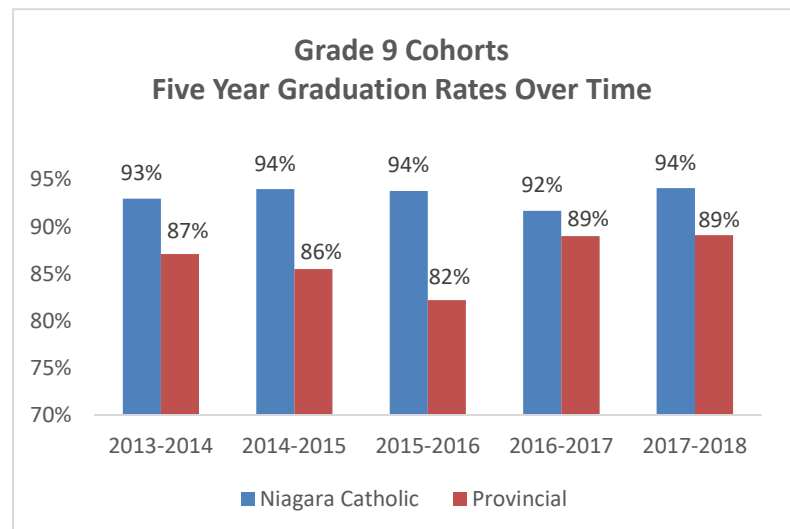
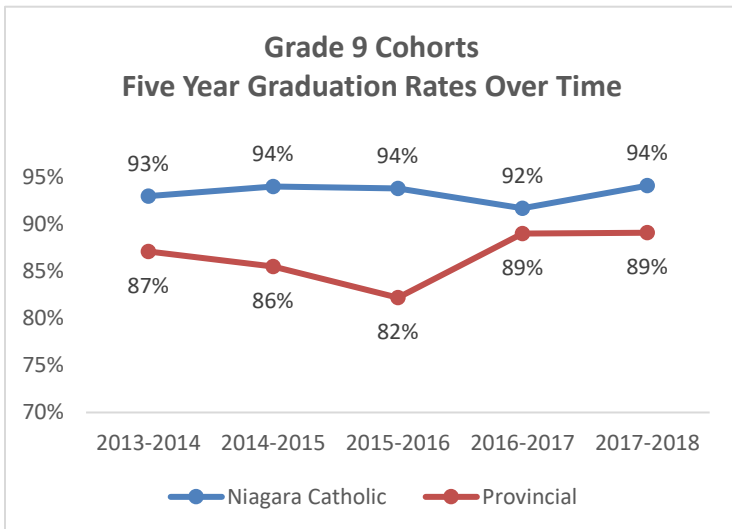
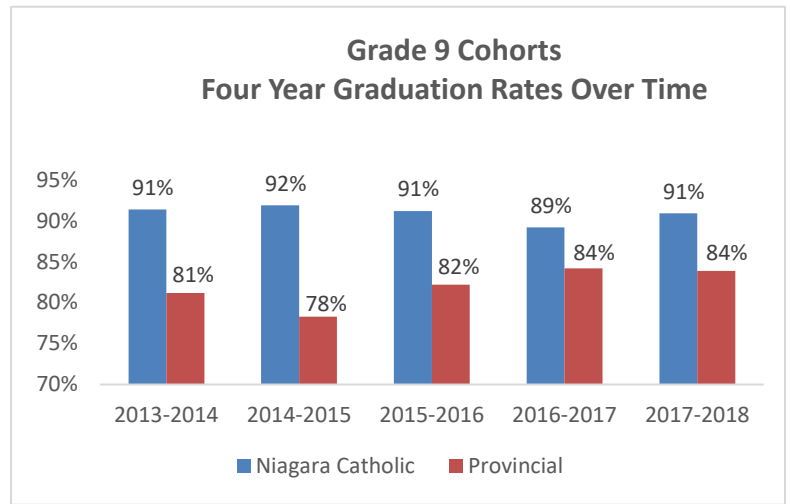
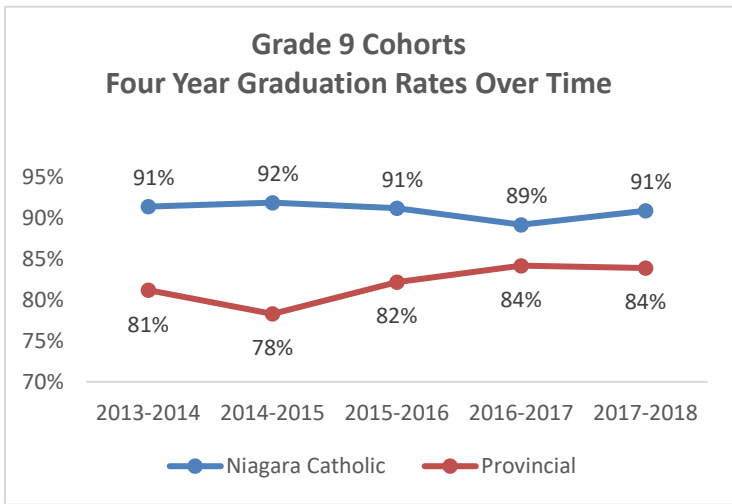
<https://www.app.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/bpr/index.html>

#### 2017-2018 Grade 9 Cohort

Graduation Rates as of August 31, 2022	Four-Year	Five-Year
Niagara CDSB	90.9%	94.1%
Provincial	83.9%	89.1%

- Niagara Catholic Four-Year Graduation Rate was about 7% higher than the Provincial Average
- Niagara Catholic Five-Year Graduation Rate was about 5% higher than the Provincial Average

# Niagara Catholic Graduation Rates 2017-2018 Grade 9 Cohort



## 2018-2019 Grade 9 Cohort

Graduation Rates as of August 31, 2022	Four-Year
Niagara CDSB	90.3%
Provincial	84.9%

- Niagara Catholic Four-Year Graduation Rate was about 5% higher than the Provincial Average.

## Niagara Catholic Programs and Supports

The Niagara Catholic District School Board provides opportunities, programs, and supports for students to be successful to achieve their graduation requirements. Transition programming from elementary to

secondary school supports students with educational, career and life planning, and planning for future pathways.

School administrators and staff, along with the Indigenous Education Lead and Student Success Teams, work together to provide programs and supports including:

- ✓ Specialist High Skills Majors (SHSM) programs to provide students with opportunities to focus on a specific sector while earning credits
- ✓ Dual Credits/Connecting to College courses, where students earn credits towards an OSSD and college/apprenticeship certification
- ✓ Cooperative Education, where students participate in a combination of classroom and workplace learning experiences while earning credits
- ✓ Continuing Education courses, where students earn credits to fulfill their OSSD requirements
- ✓ Niagara Launch Centre, which provides technology-based programs through experiential learning
- ✓ Pope Francis Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools for academic and other supports for students in Grades 7 to 12
- ✓ Saint Kateri Tekakwitha Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools provide programs and community partnerships for Indigenous students
- ✓ Supervised Alternative Learning (SAL)
- ✓ Child and Youth in Care programs

**Success Data for the 2022-2023 School Year Dual Credit/Connecting to College programs:**

Connecting to College: 24 students

Connecting to College-Niagara Link: 36 students

Dual Credit-Team Taught Construction: 20 students

Dual Credit-Team Taught College Math: 20 students

OYAP Level 1, Hairstyling: 30 students

**SHSM Success Rate:**

	Completion/Success Rate 2020-2021	Completion /Success Rate 2021-2022	Completion/Success Rate 2022-2023
Niagara CDSB	77%	88%	66%
Provincial	66%	68%	68%

As of October 31, 2023, 1224 Grades 11 and 12 students were registered in SHSM courses.

SHSM Sectors

- Arts & Culture
- Aviation & Aerospace
- Business
- Construction
- Energy
- Environment
- Health & Wellness
- Horticulture & Landscaping (Green Industries)
- Hospitality & Tourism
- Information & Communication Technology
- Justice, Community Safety; & Emergency Services
- Manufacturing
- Non-Profit
- Sport
- Transportation

The Niagara Catholic Graduation Rates for the 2017-2018 Grade 9 Cohort as of August 31, 2022  
report is presented for information.

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Prepared by: Lee Ann Forsyth-Sells, Superintendent of Education

Presented by: Lee Ann Forsyth-Sells, Superintendent of Education

Approved by: Camillo Cipriano, Director of Education/Secretary-Treasurer

Date: January 30, 2024

**TO: NIAGARA CATHOLIC DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD  
BOARD MEETING  
JANUARY 30, 2024**

***PUBLIC SESSION***

**TITLE: REVISED ESTIMATES FOR THE YEAR 2023-2024**

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The Revised Estimates for the Year 2023-2024 report is presented for information.

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Prepared by: Giancarlo Vetrone, Superintendent of Business and Financial Services  
Rosa Rocca, Controller of Business and Financial Services

Presented by: Giancarlo Vetrone, Superintendent of Business and Financial Services  
Rosa Rocca, Controller of Business and Financial Services

Approved by: Camillo Cipriano, Director of Education/Secretary-Treasurer

Date: January 30, 2024



## **REPORT TO THE BOARD JANUARY 30, 2024**

### **REVISED ESTIMATES FOR THE YEAR 2023-2024**

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#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The Ministry of Education requires that Ontario publicly funded school boards file the Revised Estimates annually by December 15. The Revised Estimates reporting cycle allows the board an opportunity to update Original Estimates filed in June by incorporating current, October 31 enrolment data and a number of months of financial activity into the estimates. This update also provides the Ministry with an updated projection of our Boards' financial positions compared to initial financial projections.

The Revised Estimates are an estimate only, and changes can and will happen between the time that Revised Estimates are submitted and the year-end is audited. In June 2023, the Board approved the 2022-2023 Original Estimate authorizing in-year expenses totaling \$294.4 million. Funding of the expenses was provided through in-year grants and other revenues totaling \$293.6 million.

Niagara Catholic's 2023-2024 Revised Estimates provide for expenses of \$297.5M, revenues of \$297.8M resulting in a projected 2023-2024 balanced budget.

The following information is attached for the review of the Trustees:

- APPENDIX A Revised Average Daily Enrolment
- APPENDIX B Revised Full Time Equivalent – Regular Day School (FTE)
- APPENDIX C Revised Summary of Operating Allocation GSN
- APPENDIX D Revised Summary of Ministry Revenue
- APPENDIX E Revised 2023-2024 Expenditures
- APPENDIX F Revised Special Education Envelope

The Revised Estimates for the Year 2023-2024 report is presented for information.

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Prepared by: Giancarlo Vetrone, Superintendent of Business and Financial Services  
Rosa Rocca, Controller of Business and Financial Services

Presented by: Giancarlo Vetrone, Superintendent of Business and Financial Services  
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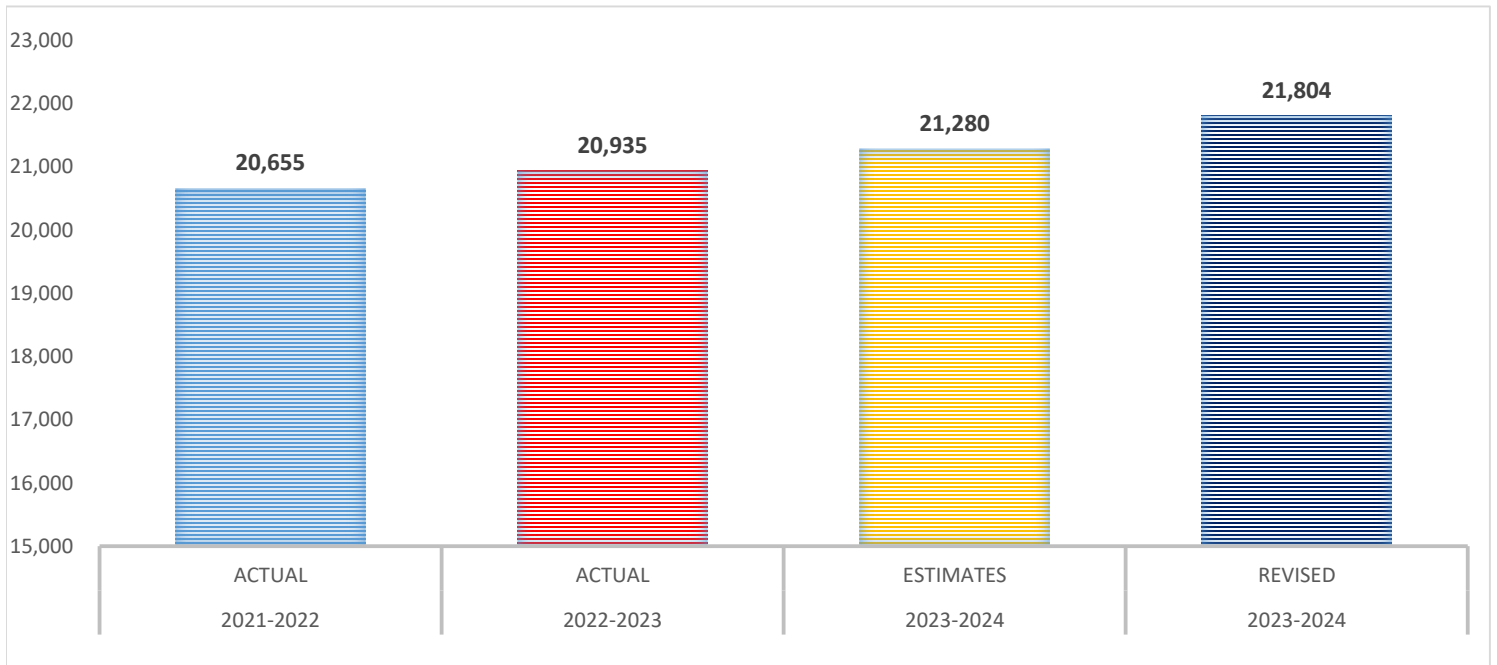
Approved by: Camillo Cipriano, Director of Education/Secretary-Treasurer

Date: January 30, 2024

**NIAGARA CATHOLIC DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD  
AVERAGE DAILY ENROLMENT (A.D.E)**

	2021-2022	A 2022-2023	B 2023-2024	C 2023-2024	(C - B) VARIANCE	(C - A) VARIANCE
	ACTUAL	ACTUAL	ESTIMATES	REVISED	REV vs EST	REV vs ACT
Junior Kindergarten	1,211	1,261	1,187	1,365	178	104
Senior Kindergarten	1,311	1,332	1,331	1,379	48	47
Grade 1 - Grade 3	4,205	4,332	4,383	4,455	72	123
Grade 4 - Grade 8	7,443	7,499	7,590	7,753	163	254
<b>Total Elementary Day School</b>	<b>14,170</b>	<b>14,424</b>	<b>14,491</b>	<b>14,952</b>	<b>461</b>	<b>528</b>
<b>Total Secondary Day School</b>	<b>6,233</b>	<b>6,263</b>	<b>6,462</b>	<b>6,525</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>262</b>
<b>Total Day School</b>	<b>20,403</b>	<b>20,687</b>	<b>20,953</b>	<b>21,477</b>	<b>524</b>	<b>790</b>
Adult, Cont. Ed, High Credits and Summer School	252	248	327	327	0	79
<b>Total Enrolment</b>	<b>20,655</b>	<b>20,935</b>	<b>21,280</b>	<b>21,804</b>	<b>524</b>	<b>869</b>

Average Daily Enrolment is the number of full-time pupils enrolled on October 31 and March 31, 2024



**NIAGARA CATHOLIC DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD  
FULL TIME EQUIVALENT (F.T.E)**

	<b>2023-2024 ORIGINAL</b>	<b>2023-2024 REVISED</b>	<b>CHANGE</b>	
	<b>JUNE</b>	<b>OCTOBER</b>		
<b>TOTAL INSTRUCTION</b>				
Classroom Teacher	1,243.1	1,254.8	11.7	1
Education Assistant	320.5	326.5	6.0	2
Early Childhood Educator	87.0	96.0	9.0	3
Professionals, Paraprofessionals and Technicians	139.4	145.2	5.8	4
Guidance Teachers	18.0	19.7	1.7	5
Library Technicians	31.0	36.2	5.2	6
Library and Guidance Other Staff	1.0	1.0	0.0	
Principals (administrative time only)	53.0	53.0	0.0	
Vice Principals (administrative time only)	21.8	20.2	(1.6)	
Administrative Support Staff	100.1	99.1	(1.0)	
Coordinators and Consultants	17.5	18.0	0.5	
<b>TOTAL STAFFING INSTRUCTION</b>	<b>2,032.4</b>	<b>2,069.7</b>	<b>37.3</b>	
<b>TOTAL ADMINISTRATION AND GOVERNANCE</b>				
Trustees	10.0	10.0	0.0	
Directors and Supervisory Officers	6.0	6.0	0.0	
Directors Office	8.0	8.0	0.0	
Board Administration	40.2	40.0	(0.2)	
Administration Support Other	3.0	3.6	0.6	
<b>TOTAL SCHOOL OPERATIONS</b>				
Managerial and Professional	4.0	4.0	0.0	
Administrative Support Staff	13.0	13.0	0.0	
Custodial Staff	134.0	134.7	0.7	
Maintenance Staff	12.0	11.0	(1.0)	
<b>TOTAL ADMIN AND SCHOOL OPERATIONS</b>	<b>230.2</b>	<b>230.3</b>	<b>0.1</b>	
<b>TOTAL NCDSB STAFF</b>	<b>2,262.6</b>	<b>2,300.0</b>	<b>37.4</b>	

1 Increase in Enrolment

2 Increase in Enrolment

3 Early Kindergarten increase in ECE support for class sizes over 15 students

4 Elementary Destreaming coaches included in Revised Estimates

5 Allocated sections realigned to Guidance Teachers from Classroom Teachers

6 Hired Library Assistants replacing Library Technicians vacancies



## GRANTS FOR STUDENT NEEDS

### SECTION 1A - SUMMARY OF ALLOCATIONS

	ORIGINAL ESTIMATES	REVISED ESTIMATES	VARIANCE	
	2023-2024	2023-2024		
Pupil Foundation	121,526,106	124,572,886	3,046,780	1
School Foundation	17,655,673	17,924,326	268,653	
Special Education	32,123,235	32,661,274	538,039	
Language Allocation	6,214,661	8,348,399	2,133,738	2
Rural and Northern Education	33,158	32,725	(433)	
Remote and Rural Allocation	137,745	137,745	0	
Learning Opportunities	3,433,628	3,595,490	161,862	
Continuing Education Allocation	1,778,407	1,810,857	32,450	
Teacher Qualification	26,266,350	25,002,590	(1,263,760)	3
New Teacher Induction	113,640	113,640	0	
ECE Q&E	1,389,237	1,392,999	3,762	
Restraint Savings	(64,921)	(64,921)	0	
Transportation	11,906,983	11,957,448	50,465	
Administration and Governance	6,716,532	6,809,961	93,429	
School Operations & Maintenance	22,124,461	22,650,822	526,361	4
Community Use of Schools	277,066	277,066	0	
Declining Enrolment	0	0	0	
Indigenous Funding	1,098,583	1,126,843	28,260	
Mental Health and Well-Being	1,373,063	1,388,909	15,846	
Supports for Students Fund	2,435,121	2,435,121	0	
Program Leadership Grant	1,008,213	1,004,963	(3,250)	
Permanent Financing of NFP	117,487	117,487	0	
<b>General Operating Allocation</b>	<b>257,664,428</b>	<b>263,296,630</b>	<b>5,632,202</b>	
Minor Tangible Capital Assets	6,441,611	6,582,416	140,805	
Trustee Association Fee	56,599	56,599	0	
<b>Total Operating Allocation</b>	<b>251,279,416</b>	<b>256,770,813</b>	<b>5,491,397</b>	

1 Enrolment increase - approx 500

2 ESL Enrolment - increase of 500 in weighted enrolment

3 Assumptions made at estimates stage re: Qual & Exp

4 Enrolment increase

## SUMMARY OF REVISED MINISTRY REVENUE

### SCHEDULE 9 - REVENUES

	ORIGINAL	REVISED	
	2023-2024	2023-2024	VARIANCE
<b>PROVINCIAL GRANTS</b>			
Provincial Grants - Grants for Student Needs	221,852,165	225,890,537	4,038,372 <b>1</b>
Provincial Grants - Others*	3,609,300	2,740,100	(869,200)
Grants from Other Ministries	1,960,000	1,960,000	0
Tax Revenue from Municipalities	37,859,700	38,904,500	1,044,800 <b>2</b>
School Generated Funds	8,480,000	8,480,000	0
Federal Grants & Fees	520,000	520,000	0
Investment Income	350,000	350,000	0
<b>OTHER FEES AND REVENUES</b>			
Fees from Individuals - Day School	1,000,000	750,000	(250,000)
Fees from Individuals - Continuing Education	850,000	850,000	0
Rental Revenue	405,000	405,000	0
Education Development Charges	1,200,000	1,000,000	(200,000)
Miscellaneous	300,000	300,000	0
Amortization of Deferred Capital Contributions	15,198,393	15,653,499	455,106
<b>TOTAL REVENUES*</b>	<b>293,584,558</b>	<b>297,803,636</b>	<b>4,219,078</b>

**1** Increase in enrolment

**2** Adjusted to 2022-23 actual final tax revenue \$38.8M

## 2023-2024 REVISED ESTIMATES

	ORIGINAL	REVISED	
	2023-2024	2023-2024	VARIANCE
<b>TOTAL INSTRUCTION</b>			
Classroom Teachers	140,235,907	141,527,547	1,291,640 <b>1</b>
Supply Staff	6,779,824	6,723,919	(55,905)
Teacher Assistants	19,918,234	19,372,158	(546,076) <b>2</b>
Early Childhood Educators	5,652,734	5,531,833	(120,901)
Textbooks and Supplies	5,643,664	5,850,201	206,537
Computers	1,656,200	1,516,176	(140,024)
Professionals, Paraprofessionals and Technicians	10,143,539	9,766,871	(376,668)
Library & Guidance	3,963,998	3,534,657	(429,341) <b>3</b>
Staff Development	261,800	265,300	3,500
Department Heads	310,000	330,000	20,000
Principals & VPs	10,248,859	10,645,145	396,286
School Office	6,159,967	6,395,087	235,120
Coordinators and Consultants	2,756,365	2,606,333	(150,032)
Continuing Education	4,997,053	5,081,933	84,880
<b>Total Instruction Expenses</b>	<b>218,728,144</b>	<b>219,147,160</b>	<b>419,016</b>
<b>TOTAL ADMINISTRATION</b>			
<b>Administration</b>			
Trustees	256,938	262,353	5,415
Director and Supervisory Officers	972,780	1,188,652	215,872
Board Administration	7,376,418	7,078,821	(297,597) <b>4</b>
<b>Total Administrations</b>	<b>8,606,136</b>	<b>8,529,826</b>	<b>(76,310)</b>
<b>TOTAL TRANSPORTATION</b>			
Transportation	13,524,444	13,771,407	246,963
Pupil Transportation	77,255	58,710	(18,545)
<b>Total Transportation</b>	<b>13,601,699</b>	<b>13,830,117</b>	<b>228,418</b>
<b>PUPIL ACCOMMODATION</b>			
School Operations and Maintenance	22,255,307	24,135,463	1,880,156 <b>5</b>
School Renewal	1,419,773	919,773	(500,000) <b>6</b>
Other Pupil Accommodation	2,457,756	2,457,756	0
Amortization	15,112,513	15,653,541	541,028 <b>7</b>
Provision Contingencies	3,149,000	3,675,000	526,000 <b>8</b>
<b>Total Pupil Accommodation</b>	<b>44,394,349</b>	<b>46,841,533</b>	<b>2,447,184</b>
School Generated Funds Expenses	8,480,000	8,480,000	0
Transfers to other Boards	550,038	678,544	128,506
<b>Total Expenses Schedule 10</b>	<b>294,360,366</b>	<b>297,507,180</b>	<b>3,146,814</b>

**1** Increase in enrolment

**2** Estimates included emergency worker cost

**3** reallocation of library technicians and library assistants reduced rate

**4** Realignment of expenses to instructional

**5** Realignment of SR Expense to Maintenance expenses, portables, adjustment to Caretaker repl costs

**6** Realignment to maintenance expenses

**7** Updated capital amortization schedule

**8** 1.25% for OECTA and Non-Union Ministry provision.

SCHEDULE 10A AND 10B  
SPECIAL EDUCATION EXPENSES

	ORIGINAL	REVISED	
	2023-2024	2023-2024	VARIANCE
<b>SPECIAL EDUCATION FUNDING - GSN,SSF, PPF</b>	<b>\$33,115,545</b>	<b>\$34,028,753</b>	<b>\$913,208</b>
<b>TOTAL INSTRUCTION ELEMENTARY</b>			
Classroom Teachers	6,786,897	6,802,454	(15,557)
Supply Staff	990,000	990,000	0
Teacher Assistants	14,778,662	14,438,516	340,146
Textbooks and Supplies	615,000	627,000	(12,000)
Computers	42,000	20,000	22,000
Professionals, Paraprofessionals and Technicians	3,725,953	3,810,105	(84,152)
Staff Development	13,000	13,000	0
Coordinators and Consultants	233,227	233,136	91
<b>ELEMENTARY SPECIAL EDUCATION</b>	<b>27,184,739</b>	<b>26,934,211</b>	<b>250,528</b>
<b>TOTAL INSTRUCTION - SECONDARY</b>			
Classroom Teachers	1,894,231	1,948,608	(54,377)
Supply Staff	231,811	230,180	1,631
Teacher Assistants	4,557,932	4,933,642	(375,710)
Textbooks and Supplies	160,000	160,000	0
Computers	30,000	30,000	0
Professionals, Paraprofessionals and Technicians	243,937	156,783	87,154
Staff Development	0	0	0
Coordinators and Consultants	0	0	0
<b>SECONDARY SPECIAL EDUCATION</b>	<b>7,117,911</b>	<b>7,459,213</b>	<b>(341,302)</b>
<b>TOTAL SPECIAL EDUCATION EXPENDITURES</b>	<b>34,302,650</b>	<b>34,393,424</b>	<b>(90,774)</b>
<b>SURPLUS/DEFICIT</b>	<b>(1,187,105)</b>	<b>(364,671)</b>	<b>822,434</b>

**TO: NIAGARA CATHOLIC DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD  
BOARD MEETING  
JANUARY 30, 2024**

***PUBLIC SESSION***

**TITLE: CORRESPONDENCE  
LETTER FROM MINISTER PARSA**

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**Ministry of Children,  
Community and Social  
Services**

Minister's Office

438 University Avenue  
7<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Toronto, Ontario  
M5G 2K8

Tel.: (416) 325-5225  
Fax: (416) 325-5240

**Ministère des Services à l'enfance et  
des Services sociaux et  
communautaires**

Bureau du Ministre

438, avenue University  
7<sup>e</sup> étage  
Toronto, Ontario  
M5G 2K8

Tél. : (416) 325-5225  
Télééc. : (416) 325-5240



127-2023-10525

January 18, 2024

Mr. Danny Di Lorenzo, Chair  
Ms. Charlotte Johnstone, Student Trustee  
Mr. Emilio Geremia, Student Trustee  
Niagara Catholic District School Board  
info@ncdsb.com

Dear Mr. Di Lorenzo, Ms. Johnstone and Mr. Geremia:

Thank you for your letter to the Honourable Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education, and me on behalf of the Niagara Catholic District School Board about the Student Nutrition Program (SNP) and for taking the time to raise your concerns.

The Ontario government funds a range of services to support vulnerable children, youth, and adults in Ontario. This includes programs such as the SNP which brings together partners in communities across the province to provide meals and snacks to children and youth in schools to support them to learn, develop healthy eating habits, and feel a sense of belonging at school. The SNP is delivered by lead agencies, such as Haldimand-Norfolk REACH, which serves the Niagara region.

These partnerships include charitable funders, corporate donors, local businesses, community fundraising and local volunteers who all contribute to the success of the program.

The ministry also funds the First Nations Student Nutrition Program (FNSNP), which is a First Nations-led program that helps provide nutritious meals and snacks in more than 120 educational settings in First Nations communities.

.../cont'd

The government announced an additional \$5 million in October to support the SNP and the FNSNP in 2023–24, this was in addition to the \$1.1 million announced in May 2023.

To build on the government's investment in the two programs, the province is partnering with the Arrell Family Foundation, the Breakfast Club of Canada, the Schad Foundation, the Grocery Foundation and Student Nutrition Ontario to launch the Healthy Students Brighter Ontario campaign, the first province-wide fundraising partnership of its kind. These organizations will work with local groups and businesses to encourage community involvement and fundraising to reach a combined goal of \$10 million, which includes the government's \$5 million investment in October.

As we continue to navigate changing circumstances related to program delivery, I want to acknowledge Niagara Catholic District School Board's efforts to continue to serve the community by providing nutritious food to children and youth.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Michael Parsa". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Michael Parsa  
Minister

c: The Honourable Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education

**TO: NIAGARA CATHOLIC DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD  
BOARD MEETING  
JANUARY 30, 2024**

***PUBLIC SESSION***

**TITLE: TRUSTEE INFORMATION  
CALENDAR OF EVENTS – FEBRUARY 2024**

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# FEBRUARY 2024

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7 SEAC Meeting	8	9	10
11	12	13 SAL Meeting Committee of the Whole Meeting	14 Ash Wednesday	15	16 Elementary & Secondary PA Day	17
18	19 Family Day	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27 Board Meeting	28	29		

**TO: NIAGARA CATHOLIC DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD  
BOARD MEETING  
JANUARY 30, 2024**

***PUBLIC SESSION***

**TITLE: TRUSTEE INFORMATION  
TRAVEL REIMBURSEMENT UPDATE**

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*Listening, Learning and Leading*

**MEMO:** Business & Financial Services Memo – B&F 409 (2023-2024)

**MEMO TO:** All Employees and Trustees

**FROM:** Giancarlo Vetrone, Superintendent of Business & Financial Services  
Rosa Rocca, Finance Officer

**DATE:** Thursday, January 18, 2024

**SUBJECT:** Travel Reimbursement

**CONTACT:** Rosa Rocca, Finance Officer



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Effective January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024, the rate for reimbursement of travel expenses will be increased to 67 cents per kilometer.

All applicable forms on My Niagara Catholic, under Board Forms-Accounting/Finance Forms, have been updated to reflect this change. These updated forms should only be used for travel and conferences/workshops attended after January 1<sup>st</sup> 2024. Forms for the 2023 calendar year will continue to be available on My Niagara Catholic until February 16<sup>th</sup>, 2024 for those that still have expenses outstanding prior to January 1<sup>st</sup>. After this date, reimbursement of travel expenses for 2023 dates will no longer be processed.

For employees who have been set up in Employee Centre to submit mileage claims, separate communication will be provided to you regarding this change and instructions on how to access the new rate for travel after January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024.

We request that you take a few moments to review the [Travel Reimbursement Procedures](#).

If you have already submitted a travel or conference reimbursement form for approval covering the period after January 1<sup>st</sup> 2024, there is no need for you to re-submit your claim.