



NEWS

## Anti-bullying bill hijacked by special interests

Christina Blizzard

Yesterday at 7:00 PM



**Premier Dalton McGuinty's anti-school bullying bill has been hijacked by special interests, says Christina Blizzard. (BRETT CLARKSON/QMI Agency files)**

No one disputes that schools need to do more about bullying.

Anyone who's had a child go through the public school system knows it is a real and prevalent problem.

No one disputes, either, that gay and lesbian young people are often the target of bullying.

The recent suicides of so many young people highlights that young people who are just coming to terms with their sexuality are often the targets of taunts and aggression.

Then again, bullies target any youngster who's different — whether they look different, speak differently, or are from the wrong side of the tracks.

Last week, the government announced its new "Accepting Schools Act," which seeks to address the gnawing issue.

What's apparent from the proposed new law is that it views bullying very much through the prism of gay and lesbian abuse.

In fact, the bill sounds more like a political statement about gay rights than a piece of legislation.

"Students need to be equipped with the knowledge, skills, attitude and values to engage the world and others critically, which means developing a critical consciousness that allows for them to take action on making their schools and communities more equitable and inclusive for all people,

including LGBTTIQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, transsexual, intersexed and questioning) people,” the bill says in part.

One section says that organizations renting space in schools must also adhere to those principles — and that’s a problem for some religious schools that rent space from the public school system.

At a news conference Tuesday, reps from Catholic, Jewish and Evangelical faiths, as well as Dr. Charles McVety of the Canada Christian College complained that the new legislation is “an affront to their family values.”

Whether you agree with them or not, the point is that parents who put their children in religious schools do so for a reason. They want their children educated according to their beliefs.

“It is an affront to the faith-based values millions of people hold dear,” said McVety.

When it was pointed out that Premier Dalton McGuinty is Catholic, Jack Fonseca from Campaign Life said the premier is, “not a very strong Catholic,” especially since he supports state-funded abortion, and gay marriage.

The point here is not whether you agree or disagree with their viewpoint. The point is that you can’t tell people what to believe — even if you’re the premier of the province.

Yes, Catholic schools are state-funded, but Catholics have a constitutional right to educate their children according to their beliefs.

And it will take a brave politician who seeks a constitutional amendment to change that.

Education Minister Laurel Broten said Tuesday that Catholic school trustees and Catholic teachers support her announcement.

That’s not the point. Those individuals don’t represent the church’s teaching any more than McGuinty does.

The Liberals would have been better to stick with Tory Elizabeth Witmer’s bill.

It addresses bullying. Full stop. It doesn’t attempt to use the law as a form of social engineering or thought control.

As it is, the new law has been hijacked by special interests who are more concerned about getting gay/straight alliances in schools than they are in dealing with bullying.

To force this on private religious schools that just happen to rent space in the public system is wrong.

Why can’t McGuinty get it right? The urgent need now is to deal with bullying.

It doesn’t matter who’s getting hurt or why — all bullying has to stop: Now.

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