

2014 School Board Trustee Candidate Survey

Press Release

In 2014 the Central Ontario Humanists contacted most of the candidates for public and Catholic school board trustee. Their press release read, “our goal was to ascertain to what extent each candidate agrees with fundamental Humanist values of freedom of conscience and the aim of the full development of all people. We are pleased to present the results.”

The Central Ontario Humanists are a social and educational not-for-profit that meets in the Barrie area. Its members are made up of people who are non-religious, and interested in science and human rights.

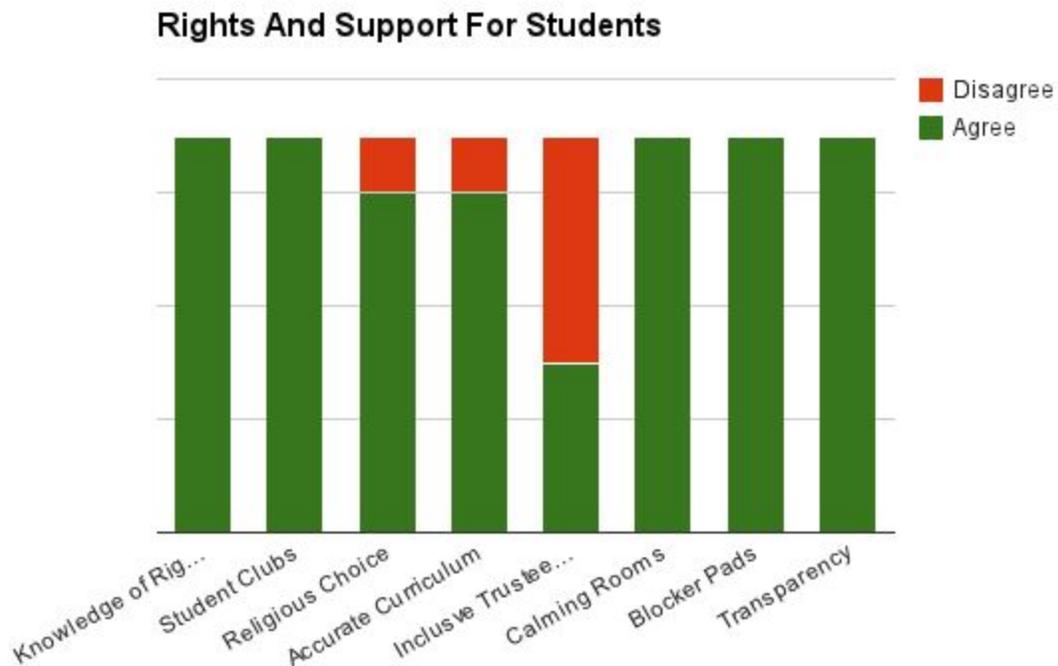
The Central Ontario Humanists "are concerned for the well being of all, are committed to diversity, and respect those of differing yet humane views. We work to uphold the equal enjoyment of human rights and civil liberties" for all. Humanism aims for the full development of all people. The group commented that, “our schools are custodians of those among us who are still developing, and so we believe the vote for school board trustee is very important.”

School Board	Area Represented	Candidate	Score
Public	Township of Bradford West Gwillimbury, New Tecumseth	Briggs, Wayne	8
Public	Township of Bradford West Gwillimbury, New Tecumseth	Da Silva, Donna	6
Public	Township of Bradford West Gwillimbury, New Tecumseth	Sopuch, Nicholas	8
Public	Township of Collingwood, Clearview	Chandler, Annie	8
Public	Township of Innisfil	Hain, Bruce	7
Public	Township of Orillia, Ramara	Colefield, Norman	7
Catholic	Midland, Penetanguishene, Tiny, Tay Ward 3	MacDonald, Catherine	6

The president of the Central Ontario Humanists, Mr. Conroy, said “we would like to thank all candidates who submitted their answers. We will not endorse any particular candidate, and it is up to all voters to decide what issues and values matter most to them. We do however give a score for candidates on how well they deal with religious freedom for students, and support for students with special needs and those who already support them.”

The Central Ontario Humanists found that all candidates who choose to take the survey believe in transparency, supporting students with special needs with calming rooms and blocks when

needed and with informed parents. All candidates also believe students should be informed on their rights and free to form clubs or associations within the school. “We are pleased that the candidates support these freedoms and options for our students. All candidates gave thoughtful replies and nuanced responses on these issues,” said Mr. Conroy.



However, Mr. Conroy “was very disappointed that the trustees did not stand behind religiously neutral trustee meetings.” To the Central Ontario Humanists, the trustees operate on behalf of government, and represent students and parents of all faiths and no faiths. As such, they believe that meetings should not open with prayer on the agenda. Mr. Conroy said, “we support all people exercising their faith. But their faith should not be on the agenda of a government body.” Even Catholic trustees should not include prayer, both because it is an institution of the government, and because non-Catholics can attend Catholic school.

Since 1986 Catholic high schools have admitted non-Catholic students. More than half of Ontario’s Catholic school boards admit non-Catholic elementary students. Some of their parents are non-Catholic. Mr. Conroy explained “our group has some atheist and agnostic members who have children going to Catholic elementary schools. And that’s not counting students who grow to leave the faith of the their parents. We support their freedom of conscience, also.”

Sadly, only one Catholic school board trustee responded to the survey. Along with trustee meetings opening with prayer, this trustee disagreed with the idea of allowing non-Catholic students attending Catholic school to opt out of religious courses or events. Recently, courts have ruled that students may opt out of these courses and programs. “As Humanists, we are appalled by the notion that the parents of an 18 year old student in grade 12 gets to dictate what

religious practices the student must be involved with. We believe that all people, at age 12, 18 or 20 should be free to believe and practice as their conscience dictates. And free to not believe and to not practice as their conscience dictates,” Mr. Conroy explained.

Methodology

This email survey was sent out on Sunday, October 19, using the email contact information from the [Ontario School Trustees](#) website. Some candidates were unreachable due to lack of publicly available email addresses. The [full list of questions are available online](#).

Links to the data

Here are the links to our data, including questions, individual responses and summaries.

Press Release (this document)

- [View on website](#)
- [PDF](#)
- [Word](#)

Full Questions and Responses

- [PDF](#)
- [Word](#)
- [View in browser](#)

Survey Questions

- [PDF](#)
- [Word](#)
- [View in browser](#)

Summary of Candidate Score and Question Results

- [Excel Spreadsheet](#)
- [PDF](#)
- [View in browser](#)

Raw Data of Survey

- [Excel Spreadsheet](#)
- [PDF](#)
- [View in browser](#)