

2026 Trustees for Durham Region

PFLAG Durham Region asked all trustees candidates for DDSB, DCDSB, KRPDSB, PVNC a list of questions including whether they would like to identify as an ally to the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. Please note, as an organization, this does not mean that we are endorsing any candidate, regardless of whether they responded to these questions.

Please note that we did not receive responses from all of the candidates - if they are not present on this list we cannot assume their allyship. If you would like to be on the list and we've missed you, please email jess@pflagdurhamregion.com

List of DDSB, DCDSB, KRPDSB, PVNC who identify as an ally to the 2SLGBTQIA+ community

Emma Cunningham	DDSB Pickering
Sanjay Sarkar	DDSB Oshawa
Hitesh Parikh	DDSB Pickering
Syed Rizvi	DDSB Ajax
Michelle Macnamara	DDSB Ajax
Jim Van Allen	DDSB Oshawa
Christopher Price	DDSB Whitby
Krista Laing	DDSB Oshawa
Michelle Ambrose	DDSB Whitby
Will Ellis	DDSB Whitby

Emma Cunningham, DDSB Pickering

1. Initiatives such as Pride flag raisings, events and crosswalks are tangible ways to stand against anti-2SLGBTQ hate speech and demonstrate that this is a safe and welcoming community for all. If elected, will you attend Pride flag raisings?

I am a strong supporter of visible markers of support for 2SLGBTQ+ students and community members. Not only have I attended flag raising at both the Board and City Hall in Pickering, I've been a speaker at Board flag raising on multiple occasions.

2. Have you ever participated in the following:
 - a. 2SLGBTQIA+ Cultural Competency Training?

Yes. The Board offers this, as does OPSBA. I also have a certificate in Human Rights for Trustees from York University's Osgoode Hall.

- b. Anti-racism Training?

Same answer as above.

- c. Indigenous education, reconciliation, or policy work related to public education?

Same answer as above.

3. When thinking about our schools, do you agree that 2SLGBTQIA+ representation in books and lessons is critical at all grade levels? How would you support 2SLGBTQIA+ students in schools?

Yes, I think it's vital for children to recognize that all kinds of relationships with ourselves and others are valid and should be cherished. I've advocated to continue offering a variety of 2SLGBTQ+ stories in schools in the face of protests and anger.

4. Do you agree with the statement that "trans rights are human rights, and must be protected as such?"

100000000%.

5. Would you identify as an ally to the 2SLGBTQIA+ Community?

Yes, and a fierce one.

6. Would you like to be placed on a list of trustees who support 2SLGBTQIA+, specifically trans, rights?

Yes.

Sanjay Sarkar, DDSB Oshawa

As a working Director with CDCD and through my past experience with the City — where I developed strategic plans to address social crises and support vulnerable communities — I have seen firsthand that inclusion is not a slogan. It is a practice. It requires courage, resources, and accountability. I bring that lens to this campaign and to the role of trustee.

1. Pride flag raisings: Yes. If elected, I will attend Pride flag raisings and will advocate for DDSB schools to recognize Pride consistently. Symbols matter, but they must be paired with action.

2. Training and education: I have participated in 2SLGBTQIA+ cultural competency training, anti-racism training, and Indigenous education and reconciliation work related to public education. I know this work is ongoing, not a checkbox.

3. Representation in books and lessons: Yes, I agree that 2SLGBTQIA+ representation is critical at all grade levels. I would support this by upholding DDSB's equity policies, ensuring resources reflect our students, and asking for accountability reports on belonging and safety. As a trustee, my role is governance: policy, budget, and oversight.

4. Trans rights are human rights: Yes. Full stop. I agree that trans rights are human rights and must be protected as such. This is not a matter of opinion — it is a matter of law and dignity under the Ontario Human Rights Code.

5. Allyship: Yes, I identify as an ally to the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. I will not use that word lightly. I will listen, learn, and act.

6. Public support: Yes, I consent to being listed as a candidate who supports 2SLGBTQIA+, specifically trans, rights. I would also like my responses to be public-facing.

I respect that people hold different personal beliefs, but as a public school trustee, my duty is to uphold human rights and ensure all students can learn safely and equitably. I have developed strategic plans to address social crises, and I will bring that same discipline to this work. I am enthusiastic about this opportunity to serve, and I am ready to do the work.

Hitesh Parikh, DDSB Pickering

1. Initiatives such as Pride flag raisings, events, and crosswalks are tangible ways to stand against anti-2SLGBTQ hate speech and demonstrate that this is a safe and welcoming community for all. If elected, will you attend Pride flag raisings?

Response:

Yes. As a trustee, my primary responsibility is to ensure that every student, parent, and staff member feels valued, respected, and safe.

If, attending Pride flag raisings and community events is an true and fair way to show visible solidarity, promote kindness, and demonstrate that our schools stand firmly against bullying, discrimination, and hate of any kind.

2. Have you ever participated in the following:

- **2SLGBTQIA+ Cultural Competency Training?**
- **Anti-racism Training?**
- **Indigenous education, reconciliation, or policy work related to public education?**

Response:

I respect the ongoing work of Truth and Reconciliation and the Calls to Action relevant to education.

Learning is a lifelong journey, and if elected, I welcome and look forward to participating in further orientation and trainings to continually deepen my understanding.

3. When thinking about our schools, do you agree that 2SLGBTQIA+ representation in books and lessons is critical at all grade levels? How would you support 2SLGBTQIA+ students in schools?

Response:

I believe that school libraries and classrooms should reflect the research based and age specific diverse world, our students live in. When students see positive, academic research and representation in the materials they read, it builds self-esteem and fosters empathy among peers.

To support all students, I will focus on:

- **Safety and Well-being:** Supporting zero-tolerance policies for bullying, harassment, and hate speech.
- **Mental Health Resources:** Ensuring students have access to caring guidance counselors, social workers, and peer-support spaces like GSAs (Gender and Sexuality Alliances).
- **Respectful Communication:** Encouraging constructive dialogue between educators, students, and families so that every child feels secure and supported in their educational journey.

4. Do you agree with the statement that "trans rights are human rights, and must be protected as such?"

Response:

Yes, absolutely. Every individual is entitled to dignity, safety, and respect under the law, including the Ontario Human Rights Code and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Protecting the human rights of an individual, and gender-diverse individuals is an essential part of ensuring our schools remain fair, safe, and lawful spaces for everyone.

5. Would you identify as an ally to the 2SLGBTQIA+ Community?

Response:

Yes. If an ally means listening with an open heart, standing up against exclusion and mistreatment, and working actively to ensure all students, regardless of background, feel safe, celebrated, and empowered to succeed.

6. Would you like to be placed on a list of trustees who support 2SLGBTQIA+, specifically trans, rights?

Response:

Yes, you have my permission to include my name on this list, provided the list remains strictly as a personal view on the subject and not promoting or endorsing any specific community.

Syed Rizvi, DDSB Ajax

I fully support with [Would you like to be placed on a list of trustees who support 2SLGBTQIA+, specifically trans, rights?]. I support every culture and religion and beliefs

Michelle Macnamara, DDSB Ajax

1. Initiatives such as Pride flag raisings, events and crosswalks are tangible ways to stand against anti-2SLGBTQ hate speech and demonstrate that this is a safe and welcoming community for all. If elected, will you attend Pride flag raisings? **I'd love to**
2. Have you ever participated in the following:
 - a. 2SLGBTQIA+ Cultural Competency Training? **Yes**
 - b. Anti-racism Training? **Yes**
 - c. Indigenous education, reconciliation, or policy work related to public education? **Yes**
3. When thinking about our schools, do you agree that 2SLGBTQIA+ representation in books and lessons is critical at all grade levels? How would you support 2SLGBTQIA+ students in schools?

Yes, I believe 2SLGBTQIA+ representation in books and learning materials is important at every grade level, in ways that are age-appropriate and aligned with the curriculum. When children see themselves reflected in their learning, it can help them feel a sense of belonging. For other students, representation helps build understanding, empathy, and respect for people whose experiences may be different from their own. Our schools should reflect the diversity of the communities we serve.
4. Do you agree with the statement that "trans rights are human rights, and must be protected as such?" **Absolutely**
5. Would you identify as an ally to the 2SLGBTQIA+ Community? **Yes**
6. Would you like to be placed on a list of trustees who support 2SLGBTQIA+, specifically trans, rights? **Yes**

Jim Van Allen, DDSB Oshawa

Initiatives such as Pride flag raisings, events and crosswalks are tangible ways to stand against anti-2SLGBTQ hate speech and demonstrate that this is a safe and welcoming community for all. If elected, will you attend Pride flag raisings?

If elected I will attend Pride flag raisings, I have previously attended various Pride flag raisings in the community and I also spoke for PFLAG Durham at the City of Oshawa's International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia



Have you ever participated in the following:

2SLGBTQIA+ Cultural Competency Training?

Yes I have attended 2SLGBTQIA+ training through the community and employers as well as PFLAGs Train the Trainer training (hosted by PFLAG Durham)

Anti-racism Training?

Yes I have attended anti-racism training through various labour organizations such as CUPE, OPSEU and SEIU

Indigenous education, reconciliation, or policy work related to public education?

Yes I have had the privilege to attend Indigenous education through the Ontario Federation of Labour and OPSEU, both in conjunction with various Indigenous groups in Ontario.

While I do not have any current direct policy work related to public education, I do have work related experience in Policy review on a pioneering project between Ontario Shores Center for Mental Health Sciences and The Ontario Human Rights Commission.

The members of the project and myself audited existing policy at the Hospital to ensure compliance with the Ontario Human Rights Code and designed new policies to ensure that compliance in Mental Health Services for patients, families and employees.

When thinking about our schools, do you agree that 2SLGBTQIA+ representation in books and lessons is critical at all grade levels? How would you support 2SLGBTQIA+ students in schools?

I do agree that 2SLGBTQIA+ representation in books and lessons is critical at all grade levels.

I would support 2SLGBTQIA+ by ensuring that I am an active Trustee in pursuing progressive board policies and ensuring that the Board is enforcing their existing anti-hate policies.

While I have limited control on day to day school operations, I would also support GSAs and 2SLGBTQIA+ student interest groups.

Do you agree with the statement that "trans rights are human rights, and must be protected as such?"

Yes, I fully agree with that statement

Would you identify as an ally to the 2SLGBTQIA+ Community?

Yes I would identify as an ally to the 2SLGBTQIA+ Community

Would you like to be placed on a list of trustees who support 2SLGBTQIA+, specifically trans, rights?

Yes I would like to be placed on a list of trustees who support 2SLGBTQIA+ rights and specifically trans rights.

Christopher Price, DDSB Whitby

Question 1. As a former Internet Child Exploitation Detective Constable and former High School Resource Officer I am not a fan of adult strangers being on school property. I want strangers to stand out to the students so they can notify staff that something is out of the ordinary. That being said, if I were to be invited by the Principal to attend their school for any kind of ceremony they were having, including a pride flag raising, I would attend. I'm just not a big fan of any kind of outside access to schools by strangers.

Question 2a. Yes, several different sessions over my career including one presented by PFLAG.

Question 2b. Yes, annually

Question 2c. Yes to education and reconciliation but not to policy work.

Question 3. I want the books and lessons at all grade levels to focus on preparing our students for the competitive world that awaits them upon graduation. One would imagine that 2SLGBTQIA+ representation could be a part of this. Whether it is critical at all grade levels? I would need to see the evidence for this before I could make a firm decision. Over my 26 years of police experience I have investigated dozens of hate crimes. Many of these were during my time as a High School Resource Officer and involved 2SLGBTQIA+ students. As the candidate that is focusing his campaign on safety I would bring my knowledge and skills in this area to help the Board work with the Durham Regional Police to ensure 2SLGBTQIA+ students feel safe and welcomed in their schools.

Question 4. Human Rights are for everyone. A Trans individual is no different from anyone else and I would protect their rights without hesitation.

Question 5. Yes.

Question 6. If you feel I can be placed on your list I would be happy to be on it.

1. If elected, will you attend Pride flag raisings?

Yes. I would attend Pride flag raisings as my schedule permits. I support opportunities to demonstrate belonging and stand against hate and discrimination. These visible commitments should be supported by everyday actions that make schools welcoming and safe.

2. Have you participated in the training and education listed?

Yes. I have participated in 2SLGBTQIA+ cultural competency training, anti-racism training, and Indigenous education and reconciliation learning. I believe continued learning and listening to people's lived experiences are essential to responsible leadership.

3. Do you support 2SLGBTQIA+ representation in books and lessons, and how would you support students?

Yes. I support age-appropriate representation across grade levels that reflects the diversity of students, families, and communities, including 2SLGBTQIA+ people. Every child should have opportunities to see themselves represented and learn to respect others.

I would support GSAs, counselling, access to trusted adults, practical staff training, and clear responses to bullying and discrimination. I would also encourage respectful communication with parents and caregivers.

4. Do you agree that trans rights are human rights and must be protected?

Yes. I support trans rights as part of my commitment to human rights for everyone. Every person deserves dignity, safety, and protection from discrimination. Supporting the rights of all people includes recognizing and addressing the particular barriers trans students may face.

5. Would you identify as an ally to the 2SLGBTQIA+ community?

Yes. My commitment to fairness and belonging includes being an ally to the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. To me, allyship means listening, learning, speaking against discrimination, and following through with meaningful action. Having advocated for my son through systemic challenges, I understand how important it is to have someone willing to listen and help.

6. Would you like to be listed as supporting 2SLGBTQIA+, specifically trans, rights?

Yes. You may list me as a candidate who supports 2SLGBTQIA+ rights, including trans rights, and publish these responses. This support reflects my broader commitment to the rights and well-being of every student and family.

Will Ellis, DDSB Whitby

1. If elected, will you attend Pride flag raisings?

Yes. I would be pleased to attend Pride flag raisings and other community events that promote inclusion, respect and belonging. I believe visible support from elected representatives matters, particularly when students and families need reassurance that they are valued and safe in their community. Every student deserves to feel that they belong, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.

2. Have you participated in the following?

- **2SLGBTQIA+ Cultural Competency Training:** I am committed to continuing to learn and deepen my understanding of the experiences and challenges facing 2SLGBTQIA+ students and families.
- **Anti-racism Training:** I recognize the importance of ongoing education and reflection to identify and address barriers to equity and inclusion.
- **Indigenous education, reconciliation or policy work related to public education:** I believe education about Indigenous history, reconciliation and the ongoing impacts of colonialism is essential to building a more informed and respectful school community.

I want to be transparent about the distinction between a commitment to these areas and formal training or policy experience. I support ongoing professional development for Trustees so that decisions are informed, inclusive and responsive to the needs of our communities.

3. Is 2SLGBTQIA+ representation in books and lessons critical at all grade levels? How would you support 2SLGBTQIA+ students?

Yes. I believe age-appropriate representation matters at every grade level. Students should have opportunities to see diverse people, families and experiences reflected in their learning environments. Representation helps students feel seen and valued, while encouraging understanding and respect among their peers.

This is a belief I hold personally, not simply professionally. Growing up in Whitby, I was sometimes the only Black student in my class. Having representation and opportunities to feel included were important to my own educational experience and personal development. Those experiences reinforced for me that students should not have to feel isolated or wonder whether they belong because of who they are.

While my lived experience is different from that of 2SLGBTQIA+ students, it has taught me the importance of listening to people whose experiences may differ from my own. Every student deserves to see that they have a place in their school community and that their identity does not diminish their potential.

As a Trustee, I would support safe, inclusive learning environments that are free from discrimination and bullying. This means upholding applicable human rights protections and Board policies, supporting educators with appropriate resources and training, and ensuring students can access trusted adults and appropriate supports when needed. I would also listen to students, parents, educators and community organizations to understand where gaps exist and how the Board can respond effectively.

4. Do you agree that trans rights are human rights and must be protected as such?

Yes. Trans rights are human rights. Transgender and gender-diverse students deserve dignity, respect, safety and equal protection under the law. As a Trustee, I would support the Board in meeting its legal and human rights obligations and ensuring that policies and practices protect students from discrimination and harassment.

5. Would you identify as an ally to the 2SLGBTQIA+ community?

Yes. I would identify as an ally to the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. I believe allyship involves more than words; it requires listening, learning, speaking up when people experience discrimination and supporting meaningful actions that make schools safer and more welcoming for everyone.

My own experiences growing up have reinforced the importance of standing up for people who may feel underrepresented or excluded. I also recognize that effective allyship means listening to people with lived experience, remaining open to feedback and being willing to learn.

6. Would you like to be placed on a list of trustees who support 2SLGBTQIA+, specifically trans, rights?

Yes. I would welcome being included on PFLAG Durham Region's list of candidates who support 2SLGBTQIA+ rights, including transgender rights.

My approach as a Trustee would be grounded in student well-being, human rights, equity, respectful dialogue and the belief that every child deserves the opportunity to learn and thrive in a safe and supportive environment.