

Aurora trustee Crowe takes the helm of the York Catholic District School Board

Elizabeth Crowe is back at the helm of the York Catholic District School Board (YCDSB) after being appointed Chair last week.

Crowe, who serves as Catholic Education Trustee for Aurora, King, and Whitchurch-Stouffville returns to the position, with Maria Iafrate being acclaimed Vice Chair.

Crowe replaces Frank Alexander in the Chair after a fraught term, one which most recently saw ongoing controversy over whether to raise the Progress Pride flag at YCDSB buildings during the month of June.

The November 20 Chair election came down to two nominees from the floor: Crowe and Alexander, each of whom was given two minutes to make their case.

'If I am honoured to be elected this evening, my commitment is not to lead but to serve using the example of Jesus washing the feet of his apostles,' said Crowe. 'I will strive to ensure that all trustees have the information they need to make strategic decisions during these difficult times that we face. This is key as we keep our focus on the multi-year strategic plan and addressing the Board deficit without impacting student achievement.'

'We all welcome the Ministry audit and their impartial recommendation for efficiencies. Our community has told us that they have waited long enough and I will work with the Vice Chair and Director to bring to the Board an equity plan based on our 'We Are Diverse, We Are One in Christ.' I ask my fellow trustees for your support.'

Alexander kept his comments brief, adding: 'My request to my fellow trustees to support me is simply this: I stand for God and for His glory and the service of His children and that's all I do.'

In a statement following the vote, Chair Crowe said she was 'honoured' at the appointment.

In spite of a new term, controversy followed the appointment, with questions being raised about how the vote was conducted.

At a subsequent meeting held on Thursday to address the issue, irregularities were recognized by Director of Education Dominic Scuglia, and the Board's 'Appointed Parliamentarian' Gillian Tuck Kutarna of Miller Thomson, stating she made an error.

'It was my error and not anything the Board of Trustees was responsible for,' she said. 'I know you made considerable efforts over the years to ensure that your process is fair and that it is not only fair to the candidates but seen to be fair. It was to that end that you decided to email your votes as a way of making sure that your process was beyond reproach. Unfortunately, in my case, it was not beyond human error, so my apologies again for my part in that and thank you for the opportunity to express that tonight.'

Scuglia reinforced this by adding, 'the error came from a third-party agency outside of the YCDSB. The Trustees and the senior team want to assure the public that they can continue to have complete confidence in how our election was conducted.'

'As a result of Monday, we have reviewed our process again and made changes to ensure that what transpired is not repeated. We apologize as well for any inconvenience or confusion caused by this error.'

Following the apology and clarification, another vote was taken with two rounds of voting resulting in Crowe and Alexander tying with five votes each. After the second round, the tie was broken with the drawing of lots.

Each candidate put a ballot with their name into the box with the name being drawn out of the box eliminated.

After his name was eliminated and the formal meeting began under Crowe, Alexander called on the Board to dig deeper into the

process through a Notice of Motion.

‘I think Monday’s session was disturbing enough that requires an investigation beyond the remarks from the former scrutineer to say that it was a glitch,’ said Alexander before reading his motion into the minutes. ‘That the Board authorize the Chair to write a letter to the York Regional Police requesting that they launch an investigation into the conduct of the election process held on Monday, November 20, 2023, to determine whether there was any misfeasance committed in the process.’

The motion was carried unanimously without discussion.

‘The police will be investigating,’ said Crowe ahead of this week’s Board meeting. ‘The letter was written and the police will launch an investigation. It doesn’t mean that we felt there was anything untoward, but we just all wanted to make sure. We owe it to the public to make sure that [human error] was all it was.’

Looking forward, Crowe said there might have been a perception of a ‘divided board’ over the past year, but ‘90 to 95 per cent of the motions we deal with’ were passed unanimously, and there’s wide-ranging support for budgets, addressing the YCDSB’s deficit, upcoming multi-year strategic plan, and policy governance.

‘On all of those things, we’re pretty well focused in the same direction,’ she says. ‘Yes, there were some contentious issues last year and everybody got very heated about that, but that is a democracy and, in the end, we have a vote and we stand by that vote.’

On her message to students, she said the Board is fortunate this year to have three student trustees and, from there, there are many leadership opportunities within schools.

‘I know students are passionate and what they really want is the student voice and the schools to be safe and caring,’ says Crowe, adding that while the Pride flag issue was divisive, an Equity Plan is coming forward to ensure that all students are represented. ‘The data that we have coming in [shows us] that there are kids in our schools who are disenfranchised, they don’t feel welcome and there are a lot of mental health issues’ and it’s not just COVID issues’ and we need to address that. As a Board, we have to put something together that will actually have an impact, not just something on paper.

‘Survey responses (from students) are telling us something and we need to listen. Maybe they can be part of the solution as well because that would be the most viable solution, and the one that would be most successful.’

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