



August 11, 2016

Dear friends:

We recently learned that the government has backed away from its disgraceful decision – cynically conveyed under cover of a “consultation” – to shutter provincial and demonstration schools starting this academic year. This is a tremendous victory for the children who would have been denied the invaluable benefits of these special schools, which allow each student to achieve their full potential.

It’s also a victory for the parents, who recognized the tremendous contributions these schools make to their children’s education and absolutely refused to let a bully government succeed in attacking kids with special needs.

And it’s a victory for the mobilizers who immediately took up the cause to save the schools and launched a carefully co-ordinated and highly effective awareness and defence campaign that engaged all interested parties and brought the plight of these kids to the front pages of the province’s media.

As happens when people rise up together, there were individuals and groups that acted as catalysts for resistance and were instrumental in forcing the government to climb down from its plan to kill off provincial and demonstration schools. If I attempted to name them all, I’d invariably leave some out – so I won’t even try. But the activist parents know who they are. The caring staff at the affected schools know who they are. And the OPSEU staff and members of the Executive Board know who they are.

In addition, I want to express my appreciation to the opposition MPPs who came to the defence of provincial and demonstration schools, notably Lisa Gretzky, Teresa Armstrong, Andrea Horwath, Todd Smith, Lisa McLeod, Vic Fedeli, and Tim Hudak. To me, this was an example of the power elected representatives can wield when they collaborate with each other and concerned allies to do what’s in the best interests of their constituents and all Ontarians.

I also want to thank the Honourable Mitzie Hunter, the newly appointed Minister of Education, for doing the right thing. It’s my firm hope that, in her, the children – *all* children – of this province will have a caring friend and unfailing advocate.

At the same time, we know from past experience that if this government retreats, often it’s only to regroup and hit even harder once they detect complacency. That’s why we dare not let down our guard. We must be ready. And we *will* be ready.

On behalf of OPSEU’s Executive Board, thank you for fighting the good fight – and congratulations on a well-deserved victory.

In solidarity,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Warren Thomas".

Warren (Smokey) Thomas  
President, Ontario Public Service Employees Union

c: The Honourable Mitzie Hunter, Minister of Education