

October 6, 2016

Ms. Carol Cotton
Chair
York Catholic District School Board

Re: St. John Bosco Child Care Centre

Dear Ms. Cotton:

Once again, I write to you on the very troubling issue of the York Catholic District School Board's pupil accommodation review of four south Woodbridge-area schools. In particular, I would like to address the third and final staff report dated September 27, 2016, which I have received and carefully reviewed.

In my previous correspondence to you of August 18, 2016, copied to all board members, I laid out my concerns around plan 1B, which would see French immersion pupils moved to St. John Bosco Elementary School, while the school's English-speaking pupils would relocate to St. Gabriel the Archangel Elementary School. I note that the final staff report continues to recommend plan 1B, notwithstanding a large number of deputations that underscored the devastating consequences of implementing it.

Most specifically, plan 1B would have a profoundly negative impact on the 13 workers OPSEU represents at St. John Bosco Child Care Centre (SJBCCC), which is located in St. John Bosco Elementary School. Most parents who send their children to SJBCCC are English-speaking area residents with other children attending St. John Bosco. If St. John Bosco pupils are moved to St. Gabriel the Archangel, SJBCCC would lose most of its clientele, leading to layoffs at the centre, perhaps even its closure.

In my prior correspondence, I had asked you and your fellow trustees to reconsider plan 1A. It is a completely viable alternative that would spare SJBCCC employees the calamitous impacts of plan 1B – and, naturally, save board members an embarrassing admission that they had charted a course right through the livelihoods of child care workers – already among the most vulnerable workers in our society.

Ontario's separate school boards were created to anchor in our children the notion that every human being has infinite value and inherent dignity. When the schools' leaders make decisions that hurt families and assault the dignity that meaningful work confers – when a viable alternative is available – then they not only set a bad example for their charges, but they undermine the very foundation upon which their schools are built.

I remind you of the hardship and anxiety you will create by potentially throwing 13 people out of work – women and men with dependants and mortgages. Have you given the plight of these families serious thought? I wonder, in your zeal for "efficiency," have you lost sight of the values and virtues you espouse in your mission statement?

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I would also like you to recall that, as members of the global human family, our universal vocation is one of service to others. As school trustees, your call to serve the public trust is explicit in your very title. But early childhood educators also serve. After parents, they are our children's first instructors. They have a formidable responsibility to protect young lives and imbue them with the qualities that will allow them to become the concerned, engaged citizens our society so desperately needs. Please do not deprive these dedicated educators of their joy in serving little ones – or rob these little ones of the best possible start in life.

Once again, I urge you to put people at the centre of the decision you will make on October 25. You have a responsibility to look, not just at the logistical advantages of the plans under consideration, but also any injurious consequences – particularly to the well-being of individuals and families. There must always be in your hearts and minds a preferential option for the poor – in this case, the vulnerable workers at SJBCCC who risk losing their jobs.

John Bosco famously said: “The school is not the end; it is rather the instrumental means for improving the way of life.” I trust you will take his words to heart as you ponder the fate of these 13 women and men and their families.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Warren Thomas", written in a cursive style.

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

c: Elizabeth Crowe, Vice-Chair, Aurora/King/Whitchurch-Stouffville
Theresa McNicol, East Gwillimbury/Georgina/Newmarket
Marlene Mogado, Markham, Area 2, Wards 4, 5, 7, 8
Teresa Ciaravella, Vaughan, Area 1, Ward 1
Maria Marchese, Vaughan/Woodbridge, Area 3, Ward 3
Dino Giuliani, Vaughan, Area 2, Ward 2
Cathy Ferlisi, Vaughan/Concord/Thornhill
Ann Stong, Richmond Hill
Dominic Mazzotta, Richmond Hill
Nicolas Bottger, Senior Student Trustee
Ben Smith, Junior Student Trustee
Ronnie Banerjee, Staff Representative, OPSEU