

May 16, 2016

Re: Please support Ontario's provincial and demonstration schools

Dear friends:

Since 1870, the province has operated provincial schools for the blind, deaf and deafblind directly - in other words, not through a school board. More recently, the province has provided demonstration schools for children with severe learning disabilities.

There is no doubt that our colleagues in the school boards do exemplary work with children with disabilities. However, provincial and demonstration schools have specialized resources that are customized to the very complex needs of the students they serve.

Earlier this spring, the Liberals began a "consultation" process on the future of five of these schools: Amethyst, Robarts, Sagonaska, Trillium and Jules-Léger. We know that these consultations were in fact a prelude to closures. OPSEU has been working with parents and stakeholders to keep these schools open. Special education is a necessity and a right. We will not allow the Liberals to balance their budget on the backs of vulnerable children.

With our partners, we have been able to build and harness public support, while helping to mobilize the leaders and caucuses of the opposition parties. Our efforts have forced the Liberals to reopen admissions for the 2016-17 school year. But this may only be a stay of execution. There is little doubt the Liberals will try again next year to shut these schools down.

Nothing short of a full and unequivocal endorsement of provincial and demonstration schools and their future will do. We can be sure the Liberals will do everything possible to lull us into a false sense of security and complacency. They want us to stow our activism so they can come back in 2017 and shutter these schools permanently.

We will do no such thing.

Kathleen Wynne and Liz Sandals have launched an attack on kids with disabilities. We cannot and will not let them win. Please visit www.saveprovincialschools.ca to see how parents are working to save these schools. For more information, please contact OPSEU campaigns officer Brian Chang at bchang@opseu.org or call [416-526-1027](tel:416-526-1027).

In solidarity,

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

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