An Open Letter to the  
Honourable Kathleen Wynne – Minister of Education  

From  
Trustee Elizabeth Hill – York South Weston - Toronto District School Board  

October 12, 2006

Honourable Minister of Education,  
Kathleen Wynne  

Dear Kathleen,  

I was astounded and saddened to hear that you have taken the step of bringing in a supervisor in “co-management” clothing to force cuts on the Dufferin Peel Catholic School Board. What a difference three years can make!  

Three years ago, at the June 26 meeting of the TDSB when we together voted to reject cuts that would have hurt students, I was very moved to hear the words you read from a message from Jane Jacobs. I would like to refresh your memory of that letter and how highly Jane Jacobs thought of us, who together stood up for the students and for the resources they need to succeed.  

Jane Jacobs wrote,  

“Stand fast I beg you: do not be co-opted to even one more school closing, even one more class cancellation. Fate does not hand out unlimited chances to be personally indispensable. It has given such chances to you. What will the Province do if you withhold cooperation with its crimes against children? That is the Province’s problem. Your problem is to continue to be determined, resourceful and courageous.”  

We stood fast, Kathleen, and the province imposed a supervisor over our democratically elected school board. We continued to fight as best we could. General Interest programs, offered for 140 years, were cancelled by the supervisor, and re-instated after much protest by adult learners. Outdoor education centres were closed. The only adult education program in the old city of York, which had 17 sites before amalgamation, was cancelled in the middle of the year. All day kindergarten classes were no longer offered. Our School Community Advisors department was eliminated.  

The provincially appointed supervisor was ultimately unable to balance the budget. The provincial government of the day was defeated by an angry electorate. Your Liberal government was elected, promising to fix the funding model, with a Premier who wanted to be known as “The Education Premier”.

I acknowledge that your government has provided additional funds to meet some election promises, such as smaller class size and literacy and numeracy programs. However, the flawed funding model is still here like a dirty diaper waiting to be changed.

The TDSB still does not receive the real costs of utilities or the real costs of salaries and benefits for its teachers and support staff. We have been forced to meet our obligations by borrowing money from other parts of our budget. It is not funded for programs and services that serve unique needs of our diverse communities, such as school pools, outdoor education centres, and the highly valued educational assistants in the regular classrooms, among other things of which you are intimately aware.

As I write this, I have great fears for the students of the Toronto District School Board, and our communities. Your advisors are putting the finishing touches to a report for tonight. They did not hear the parents who came to speak to the board … consistently telling us to refuse cuts to their valued system.

I was recently at the Dufferin Peel Catholic District School Board meeting when it had the courage Jane Jacobs talked about. The trustees refused to accept being undermined nor would they allow their director to make the cuts….

Kathleen, the TDSB started this three year term under supervision and co-management. I appeal to you as the Minister of Education, as someone who has spent her life supporting public education, not to order the TDSB to balance a budget on the backs of the most vulnerable.

*Do the right thing – help us find the funding that we need.*

*It’s about kids, not cuts.*

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Hill
Trustee, York South-Weston

Attachment (see below)
Letter from Jane Jacobs to Kathleen Wynne
(retyped from the original)

Read out at Board meeting June 26, 2002 when Board was voting to reject cuts to balance its budget:

Dear Kathleen:

I wish I could be at the meeting June 26, but as that is not possible I thank you for conveying my sentiments. You are at liberty to use my statement, or any part of it, in any other way that you might judge is useful:

The Province of Ontario’s dysfunctional funding and consequent miseducation policies are crimes against the children of Toronto and therefore the city’s future: crimes against us all.

As a citizen, I applaud the District’s trustees and their leadership, for refusing any longer to cooperate in these crimes. It has become internationally recognized that obedience to military authority is no excuse for engaging in military crimes against humanity. Morally, a similar principle applies to civil authority when it demands engaging in serious civil crimes against humanity.

You have already tried giving in and going along for several years. This have given us such catastrophes as elimination of music from education of public school children, skimping English teaching to children of immigrants, and giving inadequate basic literacy and numeracy instruction to many children of the poor.

Your slogan that the schools must give children what they need to succeed, says it all.

Stand fast I beg you: do not be co-opted to even one more school closing, even one more class cancellation. Fate does not hand out unlimited chances to be personally indispensable. It has given such chances to you. What will the Province do if you withhold cooperation with its crimes against children? That is the Province’s problem. Your problem is to continue to be determined, resourceful and courageous.

Your only reward – apart from personal satisfaction of knowing you are doing the right thing – will probably be admiration and support by the public. Be assured that this support is growing; citizens who are neither educators nor parents have been waking up to the enormity of the civil crimes that the Province is visiting on children and on the workings of fragile city neighborhoods.

Bravo to you, on whom so much depends!

Jane Jacobs