

OECTA provincial election ads influencing few ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

TORONTO - As the partisan rhetoric ramps up for the Ontario election, the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association's attempts at influencing the vote seem to be having little impact so far.

OECTA's "Who Speaks for Children" campaign was launched on YouTube in March. It highlights the successes of Ontario students since 2003, when the Liberal government came to power. It lauds Ontario's recent education successes and refers to the tumultuous period of the Mike Harris years when unions clashed constantly and bitterly with Harris' Conservative government.

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When it was first unveiled, critics blasted the campaign as blatant political support for the Liberal Party.

But OECTA denies this, saying the ad is "non-partisan."

Some education experts believe the campaign is not registering with voters because education is being overshadowed as a top election issue.

According to a recent Nanos poll, 26 per cent of those surveyed ranked health as their top election priority, followed by the economy and high taxes.

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York University political science Prof. Robert Drummond, sees a different reason for voter apathy on education. Despite being "effective" in its message, public apathy about the ad could be a result of the good academic results of Ontario students over the past few years.

"The Liberal government may be a victim of its own success," he said.

For the Toronto Association of Parents in Catholic Education, the ad has been under the radar until recently.

"From a parent's perspective, it hasn't actually hit TAPCE. We kind of steer clear of more political stuff because of the charitable nature of our organization," said TAPCE president Dan Barrett.

Barrett said he recently heard of the ad when his children started asking about it.

But he noted that the lack of discussion about the ad could be that "it speaks to the fact that the education issue is not one of the high priorities in the platforms of any of the parties."

"With the economic times we face, it's understandable," Barrett said.

The campaign's message is important though, he said.

"I don't think you're going to see a lot of education issues on the (election) agenda without this kind of campaign," he said.

O'Dwyer says the aim is to put education front-and-centre in the election debate.

"It's about speaking for children, anyone who is ineligible by age to cast a vote," he said.

"Anyone going to the polls on Oct. 6 has an opportunity to vote on behalf of those individuals."

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Region: Ontario ^[2]

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