

Enrolment campaign divides Catholic school board trustees

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Town Crier

\$925,000 advertising cost lining consultants' pockets while students go without, charges North York

By Paul Hutchings

An ad campaign designed to increase enrolment numbers has trustees of the Toronto Catholic District School Board bickering among themselves.

The board awarded a \$925,000 campaign to ad agency Navigator Inc. to help boost declining enrolment and increase awareness of Catholic education to newcomers in the city.

Local school board trustee Maria Rizzo spoke out against the campaign at a recent board meeting. She made a motion to have it scrapped, stating the high cost can't be justified and the money could be better spent elsewhere.

"I don't believe we're in the business of lining the pockets of consultants rather than educating children and spending the tax dollars that we have for education purposes," she told the *Town Crier*.

"What I'm saying is that it's a waste of money when we have the kinds of problems where kids don't have textbooks and the supplies they need, and where there are things like crumbling buildings and not enough capital dollars to make them better."

But fellow North York trustee Mary Cicogna voted for the campaign, saying the Catholic board has lost 10,000 potential students over the past seven years, and the ad campaign is very necessary.

"I'm in favour of the campaign because this is a very serious matter and we needed to do something to deal with the issue of enrolment in our schools," said Cicogna. "Each year we were losing a lot of students, and that means less grants for us in the long run. It means we wouldn't have the money to address facilities in our board."

She defended the choice of Navigator to run the ad campaign, claiming that despite the high cost the company was the lowest bidder. The campaign consists of print and TTC ads, as well as direct telephone marketing, all aimed at newcomers to the city.

Cicogna said there isn't a shortage of textbooks and supplies in her ward, and extra money has been given to local schools over the past year in spite of the cost of the ad campaign.

“Regarding textbooks, our schools have supplies,” she said. “There was money left over which we divided among the schools. In the recent budget we gave \$5,000 extra to each elementary and \$10,000 to each high school. I don’t see a shortage of materials in my schools, I haven’t heard anything about that.”

Rizzo said the situation is a result of the provincial government’s lack of funding for education that forces boards of education to make these decisions, and if they were funded properly they wouldn’t be in this situation.