

History Of Popular Opinion Before 2007 Ontario Provincial Election

Bryan Kerman

bkerman@lara.on.ca

It is interesting for those in the One Schools System Network to view the trend in voting intention, particularly its predicted outcome in seats in the Legislature after October 10, 2007. In particular OSSN needs to know whether it had an impact on the outcome, and what the general mood is for moving forward to a one school system..

The answer to whether we have been effective is a distinct, YES.

The graph below shows the results of a projection done over a period of about 7 months before the election, based on a model suggested by Professor Werner Antweiler at UBC (www.nodice.ca/elections/ontario/projections.php).

To orient oneself, 0 on the horizontal axis is election day, and the heavy horizontal line at 54 on the vertical axis represents when a party has a majority of seats in the new 107 seat Legislature.

The general structure of the 3 parties is:

1. A slow rise of the Liberals in the last 7 months
2. A corresponding slow decline in the Conservatives expected number of seats
3. A very flat, insensitive, behaviour in NDP fortunes

However there are several important distinct changes occurring within that 7 months in the relative fortunes involving the Liberals and Conservatives which involved the OSSN.

The first is the date of the first Queen's Park press conference which occurs just as the Conservatives lose their potential majority (at about 120 days before election day). The Liberals jump by about 10 seats as the Conservatives fall and the NDP sinks slightly.

This is a switch for which the Conservatives never recovered. OSSN can take credit for bringing this issue to the attention of Ontario and setting the stage for Tory's defeat.

Whether the slow decline before the OSSN press conference was caused by OSSN is open to question. During that time many letters to editors were being printed and the general awareness of extended funding was rising. But so was the give away program of promised funding by the Liberal government. What is needed is a review of opinion setting potential for the period from mid April to about mid May, when the Liberals gained 15 potential seats mostly from the Conservatives but also from the NDP. And the period, mid May to the end of June, should be evaluated to see what the Liberals were doing, if anything, to swing opinion.

The other interesting aspect is the almost flat response for both Liberals and Conservatives from mid July to mid September. Aside from the fact that no polls are reported when in fact the campaign had begun, to have the Conservatives rise slightly by the eve of the debate, when the negative press was withering, is very strange. The suspicion is that the supporters who switched were non-Catholic Conservatives from Tory, replaced by yet more Catholic Liberals who recognized that the defeat of Tory was the precursor to their school system becoming isolated and vulnerable. Another suspicion is that not many people were in a mood to make political judgements during the typical laid-back summer doldrums.

The last of the obvious changes started to occur just before the debate. Tory's proposal had been savaged and his support from the MFC and Catholic constituency was rendered voiceless against a wave of indignation, starting about mid August.

It appears that if 'Hampton won the debate', it was irrelevant, as the only thing that happened after the debate is that his electoral prospects continued to weaken. At the same time Tory's support plummeted and the Liberals shot up. Those potential Liberal supporters must have come either from Conservatives convinced Tory's proposal was for real, and they would have none of it, or reluctant Liberals returning to support McGuinty in the face of the Tory plan.

The trend, if it continues to election day (which is not expected) would return the Liberals with a convincing majority. Whatever the change in the last week of the campaign, the Liberals are guaranteed at least a comfortable majority.

The data, provided from 'Nodice' and graphed and analyzed here, give a very clear answer to what the political situation will be on October 11th. The Liberals will govern without interruption from any party for the next 4 years, and will probably avoid the One School System issue, ie the end of public funding of Catholic schools. The Conservatives will remain the largest opposition party but will be unable to speak for a one school system without looking like hypocrites. At the very least it will leave the Conservatives extremely divided and marginalized.

In particular, the NDP will be a very weak rump with a sense of failure. They will be keen to remove Hampton as ineffective and a cause of their defeat by his stubbornness in not adopting a pro-OSS policy. It is predicted that the whole NDP leadership battle will be a Catholic vs non-Catholic fight to sign up the largest number of new members so as to get the largest number of voting delegates to a leadership convention.

It is for OSSN to begin to prepare to meet this challenge.

