

Attawapiskat school funding plight showcased on YouTube

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BY BILL BRADLEY

Internet-age technology and a Youtube video are helping James Bay students get the message out that they need a new school.

Timmins-James Bay MP Charlie Angus, the colourful leader of the Grievous Angels – a popular hard rock band - has used the skills he honed over years of making music with the band, to make a stirring video for the cause that has been posted on YouTube.

The video chronicles the plight of students in the James Bay Cree community of Attawapiskat. The students currently have to attend school in drafty portables. They have no library or playground. They are trying to get the federal government to fund a new school.

The video was showcased at the NDP Northern caucus meeting last weekend at the Days Inn in Sudbury.

"The students of Attawapiskat have been in a fight for a new school for eight years," said Angus, adding the federal government has said the wait will be another eight years.



For eight years, the children of Attawapiskat, James Bay have been fighting for a new school. Timmins-James Bay MP Charlie Angus has launched a YouTube video campaign to get Ontario schools to support these students. Photo Supplied.

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Using voice-overs from the students, background native music, and graphic pictures taken from the community, the video is a call to action and is directed towards mobilizing students across the province, including Greater Sudbury, to write letters of support to Indian Affairs Minister Chuck Strahl for the cause.

"Charlie did the video himself one weekend. We knew he was up to something but when we saw it, we were blown away," said Janet Doherty, administrative assistant in Angus's Ottawa office.

"I know in my heart people want to change the world for the better but they don't know how. I thought it was time to use the new media, like YouTube, to show them how they can make a difference," said Angus.

The MP first started to use the video to seek support for the native cause by contacting the Catholic School board in Cobalt.

"Then, news of the video showed up in the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' newsletter in April. Everything took off very fast from there," said Doherty.

Angus said, at last count, 100 schools are participating in the action and the Toronto Board of Education is distributing posters in all their schools.

"When it went on YouTube we got 5,000 hits in 36 hours. It is like taking out an ad without having to pay any money for it. I am also taking this campaign to the blogging community," said Angus.

Angus said, at first, Indian Affairs treated the YouTube campaign as a joke, hoping it would just go away.

"This is no joke. Every day another 1,000 view this video. Most are youth," said Angus.

"Minister Strahl's decision to walk away from the children of Attawapiskat has become a symbol of this government's failure of First Nation's children."

Last week Angus was in Sault Ste Marie at a high school and elementary school seeking support, said Doherty. On Wednesday, May 28, Angus took the fight to Ottawa. Grade 8 students from Attawapiskat will be in attendance at a rally on Parliament Hill and will march in a national Aboriginal Day of Action on Thursday.

For more information visit www.attawapiskat-school.com.

To view the YouTube video, go to <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QzLMuW1N50I> .

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