

**Canadian Parents for French**

**Provincial and National French  
Second-Language Education  
Stakeholder Consultations**

**Edmonton, Alberta**

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## Introduction

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Chair Stuart Wachowicz introduced Laurie Hodge, Executive Director of Canadian Parents for French (CPF) Alberta.

Laurie Hodge said CPF Alberta was asked by the CPF National Office to lead a stakeholder consultation arising from the National Symposium held in March 2004, concerning the federal Action Plan for Official Languages. After reviewing calendars with key stakeholders in Alberta, CPF Alberta decided the best way to hear from stakeholders was to tack consultations on to this meeting, to host a small meeting with Alberta Learning, and to invite e-mail commentary. Hodge noted that Wachowicz and Wally Lazaruk were among the Alberta participants at the National Symposium and could provide further background information if needed.

After reviewing the purpose of this stakeholder consultation, Hodge allowed a few moments for participants to review the consultation guide. She noted the recurrence of themes already raised by Consortium members: teacher excellence, community buy-in, policy changes, and achievement of the 50% goal. She invited comments with national application as well as those specific to the Alberta context, such as the lack of mention of enhanced first language programming for First Nation, Métis, and Inuit communities.

This report reflects comments made by participants during the two days of discussions as well as comments submitted by e-mail.

## Education

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### Question 1: Students and learning

**What are the first steps to be taken in marketing bilingual education to students at all levels—from elementary to high school entry, from high school graduation to post-secondary education and life-long learning—and making it a genuine experience to learn a second language? How can resources and support from outside the classroom be mobilized to enrich FSL instruction and capture the magic of bilingual education?**

### Recommendations

Establish national task forces to examine the following areas that pertain to students and learning:

- Interaction/exchange with francophone communities
- Program changes (outcome, assessment tools, competencies for students)
- Marketing and promotion of programs

These national task forces should be initiated by the Commission or by Canadian Parents for French, or some combination. Similar work should be undertaken at the provincial level. Some of the issues require hours of study; the National Symposium was a first step that requires follow-up.

## Discussion

There is extensive research to show that the study of a second language by children, especially at a young age, enhances their intellectual, social, economic, and cultural growth, said an e-mail respondent. Since schools are the medium through which language instruction is imparted, it is imperative that the quality of instruction meets the needs of all students.

A participant recommended that the strategy on Page 1 (promote benefits of learning French/English language and culture) be made more specific to recognize that a second language is an essential and not a secondary skill, on par with first language and mathematics rather than music and options.

An important strategy will be to address public and educator myths by promoting research that demonstrates the benefits to first language capacity of learning a second language. An e-mail respondent commented on the lack of large-scale research into FSL education—research that is needed to make the programs even more effective. These include, but are not limited to the optimal time to introduce English language arts in early immersion, the implications of combining early and late immersion students in the same classes at the secondary level, the long-term outcomes of intensive core French, and questions of diagnosis and remediation for special needs students in FSL programs (especially immersion). Encouragement/incentives and interprovincial cooperation are needed in order to address these sorts of questions.

Another e-mail respondent said that in order to market bilingual education, it is necessary to show students the importance of a second language and help them understand that they are not only Canadians, but also citizens of the world. Show them the economic benefits of being bilingual and recognize their efforts and achievements. Most people in Alberta do not see a career advantage with learning the French language. In Eastern Alberta and Southern Saskatchewan, the community is more likely to say its culture is German.

A participant asked for further information on the Maritime survey of high school core French students referenced on Page 6 of the consultation guide. He suggested reviewing the results of the promotional package developed by German teachers through the Alberta Teachers Association to promote the career potential of second language acquisition. He also challenged people in the FSL field to conscientiously examine their own practices. “Are you reflecting the two languages and cultures?” he asked. Material in the FSL field is very anglo-dominated, with a near absence of French language scholarship and cultural references. People in the field need to model the behaviour they want from students and get rid of this anomaly in the profession.

When asked what more could be done to attract and keep students, a participant replied: “Good students are attracted to good programs, and so we need to work on teachers first.” An e-mail

respondent noted that because retention is particularly problematic when students switch schools (for example, grade school to junior high, or junior high to high school), marketing should focus on these transition times.

Other suggestions were to promote the extended French program (which has been very successful) and work harder to retain those already in French immersion. Commenting that she was struck by the notation that “current core French programming will not be sufficient to double the number of bilingual high school graduates,” a respondent said, “Obviously, in Alberta this is extremely true; however, we would certainly be able to meet this goal if we *retained* students in the French Immersion programmes. We seem to be able to attract them in the early years.”

A participant noted the circularity of the strategies and issues. If second language is an essential skill, students do not need to be persuaded to take the course. If a school board or university hires excellent teachers, it will attract the best students.

The next person said students need a chance to use the French language, and recommended starting exchanges in the fourth grade, with Québec and within the local francophone community. The next person agreed, noting the high numbers of ESL teachers in Québec looking for schools with which their students can communicate.

A participant suggested the following policy change: Every student of a second language in Canada will have the opportunity to have an exchange with a school in Québec or another French-speaking part of Canada. “By opportunity, I mean mandatory exchange,” he explained. There are opportunities within the current system but they are most often used by people-in-the-know, such as the children of teachers and lawyers. The ministries of education would have to cover the costs. However, it is getting increasingly difficult to organize exchanges in jurisdictions where risk management is an issue. Arranging a billet requires a home visit, and there are even risks involved in “virtual exchanges,” or e-mail correspondence.

Others noted a lack of support from school administrators who think cultural exchanges take away from teaching time and incur too high of a liability, and from Alberta Learning that may not recognize a credit obtained in another district.

A participant suggested that a list of activities and experiences available in local francophone communities be developed and distributed to teachers across the province. Another emphasized the value of virtual exchanges. She called for a forum for FSL and ESL teachers to meet in order to develop online partnerships for their students.

The person who recommended mandatory exchange programs said he supported each of the additional suggestions. However, not one can quite make up for an exchange program where one is surrounded by a majority French language culture and community. “I am aware of the difficulties minority francophone communities have in holding on to their cultures,” he said. Many francophone schools in minority communities are more like immersion schools, with much of the playground and even classroom conversations being conducted in English. He cautioned against placing too many demands on minority francophone communities. He

characterized a mandatory exchange program as a Cadillac proposal that is nevertheless possible. “It is not unrealistic to have Canadians in one part of the country spend time with someone from another part of the country sometime in their school life,” he said.

One e-mail respondent said, “Since the start of our bi-annual French immersion exchange with a Quebec School (SEVEC Exchange), there have been less students dropping out of French immersion. Further assistance with financing exchanges may help schools increase FI numbers.”

Several people discussed whether students were attracted to second language classes because of the qualities of the teacher. “Teachers make or break a program,” one person explained. “Their dynamism brings students along.” Another said this was less relevant in junior high school, where the largest influence is the student’s peers.

A participant noted that many of the peers of a student in an immersion program would likely not be in the immersion program. Furthermore, the other major influence—pop culture—is also predominantly English. “It would help if we could create an emotional connection with students and the larger community,” she said. Current French immersion programs are too scholarly and too removed from the real world. An e-mail respondent concurred, saying that efforts are needed to involve students in the local francophone community and to bring in students from other immersion programs. Even when there is strong support from home, French immersion students can face tremendous peer pressure to join the mainstream English program—schools have a huge challenge to ensure that the French immersion does not appear to look like an elitist, segregated program.

Another participant also agreed. “French culture in classrooms becomes stagnant,” he said. “Let’s get real. Let’s show students French in the 21 century and show them we’re more than folklore.” He praised the music videos and the pop music of Québec and Europe. A respondent called for an emphasis on spoken French versus written French and grammar.

The high cost of air travel across Canada was cited as a major barrier to cultural exchanges. Travel to a majority French language community has a profound impact on students. Students reframe how they see the language when they see it lived in a milieu as a main language.

It was suggested that the study of a second language should be mandatory until the end of Grade 12. It is also important that students, especially those in Junior High School be encouraged not to succumb to “peer pressure” to drop out of a program. Another respondent noted the significant attrition from French immersion in Grades 7 to 9. One of the most common reasons cited is that students and parents want math instruction in English.

Ongoing parental support is important. An e-mail respondent noted that this is not always easy to accomplish. Unilingual parents or parents who do not speak French worry that they have made the wrong choice and will not be able to help with homework or communicate with their child’s teacher. They also worry that their child may be disadvantaged in English.

A participant noted the strong correlation between leadership from school boards and administration and the enrolment and retention of students in a second language program.

However, an e-mail respondent commented that school administrators also need support as oftentimes, parents of children in immersion programs can be quite demanding. An additional problem is that school administrators, who are not proficient in the second language, evaluate teachers and programs, something that is challenging for all involved.

The current funding for French immersion is quite low for part-time programs, making it hard to continue the program. If there were more support for part-time French immersion, schools would be able to expand their French immersion numbers. Special interim financial support is needed for very small immersion programs until class sizes become viable (hopefully as a result of the Action Plan). Too many established programs have, because of low numbers, developed a tradition of ending at the junior high level, or fading to nothing more than French language arts in Grades 10 to 12. This cycle must be broken. As well, French immersion is now expanding into ever-smaller communities, beginning with very small and sometimes combined grade (kindergarten, Grade 1) classes, and they require extra support to continue until enrolments grow.

It is also important to address accessibility issues so that all students can access French immersion and extended French programs regardless of where they live. Policies vary considerably from school board to school board.

Another e-mail respondent said that students who are not enjoying the program will drop out early. The program must be fun and exciting in the early grades, cool in the middle grades, and meaningful in junior high schools and high schools. Junior and senior high school students need to be confident that this special program will provide them with advantage. Teachers are key to the program—an “infusion of enthusiasm and freshness” is needed for all grades, all subjects, all year long but even more so for special programs.

A respondent asked for a set of tools, resources, and strategies aimed to help later-grade elementary students understand their language achievements thus far. This age group needs incentives beyond future job possibilities, which does not usually influence too many adolescents. They need concrete reasons to be enthusiastic about their language learning.

Another participant identified a structural issue between secondary and post-secondary schools: when post-secondary institutions do not distinguish between immersion and non-immersion credits, students are tempted to leave a French Language Arts course for French 30 where they will attain a higher grade. He suggested scholarships be weighted to encourage French immersion.

A group member noted the lack of discussion at the National Symposium about quality learning materials. For a recent project on community, students noted that only Manitoba and New Brunswick had bilingual Web sites. “So when you are doing a project on what Canada is all about, you are stuck in English,” she said. She encouraged all governments to have Web sites in both official languages. In addition, only two Canadian publishers produce bilingual material.

Several people discussed whether immersion students are penalized in university by being placed in 200 or 300 level French courses in their first year. One delegate thought younger students

were at a disadvantage because they were not analyzing at a mature enough level. Another disagreed, saying the courses focused on language and not literary analysis.

A participant recommended the federal government support and build on a recent Red Deer television campaign on French language programs that led to a rise in enrolment.

Another suggested that universities follow the example of the University of Ottawa and make second language an admission requirement.

A participant said high schools should develop portfolios to inform universities about the meaning of their credits. For example, a credit in French 30 means the student is able to do such and such. Another delegate noted a similar need for universities to set out their standards. He asked participants to visit the objectives posted on the interdepartmental Web site and provide their feedback.

The next person called for official school and provincial recognition that a student has come through an immersion program. Parents and students have expressed disappointment that transcripts do not make this distinction.

Delegates discussed the best method of official recognition. One suggestion was for the provincial government to issue a certificate to accompany a transcript, provided this certificate was seen as a starting point for the larger task of identifying competencies. A group member suggested this idea raised jurisdictional concerns for school boards who would not like to see the development of a school-within-a-school, or a second kind of diploma. Others argued for as much specificity as possible; the certificate should note the number of credits attained in a French immersion program.

A participant noted the need to strengthen the capacity of schools that are unable to offer all the immersion courses.

The Alberta French Language Education Consortium passed a motion asking the provincial government to adopt a French immersion certificate for graduating Grade 12 students indicating the number of credits taken in French.

Another suggestion was for post-secondary institutions to offer some courses in French so that students can continue in their field of study (history, chemistry, etc.) in French.

Much more work needs to be done for special needs children in FSL (especially immersion but also core French) programs. Diagnostic tools normalized for an immersion population and individuals trained to interpret the results are sorely needed. Teachers should address the needs of gifted and learning disabled students within FSL programs, and should receive necessary supports (professional development, resources, access to specialists) to do so. Parents need information on how to help their special needs children, especially when those parents have no working knowledge of French.

## **Question 2: Teachers and instruction**

**What are the prospects for attracting and training the next generation of competent, enthusiastic FSL instructors, and for ensuring that they have the resources and support that they need to succeed?**

### **Recommendations**

Strike a national task force to examine the following areas that pertain to teachers and instruction:

- Teacher recruitment
- Teacher competencies
- Adequate funding and incentives for teacher training
- Adequate peer support and ongoing professional development for FSL teachers

### **Discussion**

One participant noted that a missing element was a lack of teachers with the necessary second language abilities and pedagogical competence to support second language programs. “This is the biggest single challenge, the biggest single barrier, and it impacts all the others,” he said.

A participant cautioned that recommendations for teacher professional development must specify the development of a plan based on the most effective methods of professional development. Otherwise, increasing professional development opportunities is simply an attempt at a quick fix.

The next participant said provincial governments find it difficult to issue certificates of competence to teachers even though it is a crucial issue for second language instruction. “It’s not one of those subject areas where you can be two weeks ahead of the students,” she said. “We don’t hire incompetent English-language speakers to teach math or social studies.” Identifying competencies is an issue across the country.

A participant proposed that a date be set after which teaching degrees will be issued only to those who have attained a second language. “It would concentrate the minds of universities and students quite nicely,” he said. He also suggested the recommendations reflect the entirety of what it takes to run a successful second language program, including further support for administration and the districts.

A participant said the recommendation to recruit inspired committed FSL teachers is laudable but too unrealistic. She asked for the addition of the strategy of inter-university exchanges between English and French post-secondary institutions.

The next group member suggested the university credit mode be replaced with a system allowing a person to teach a second language if they meet a list of competencies, as is done by the Canadian Language Council. This would bring into the public system the top French teachers

currently working in private schools because they do not have a teaching degree. Private schools are held to certain standards.

Another person agreed that a competency test is needed for university graduation and certainly for the FSL hiring process. Attaining a good grade in a university language course is no guarantee someone can speak the language. Given the shortage of FSL teachers, some Bachelor of Education students are so confident they will get a FSL position regardless of their French language skills they do not strive for proficiency.

“At some point we should stop hiring people who can’t speak French,” another participant said. The resultant drop in FSL courses would motivate parents to put pressure on school boards and governments to address the problem. “At a certain point, we are not doing any good hiring someone who has six credits of French,” she said.

A group member suggested the current chair of the Alberta French Language Education Consortium write the Assistant Deputy Minister and offer to work with the province to develop the list of competencies and seek support of the College of Alberta School Superintendents. Another group member asked that each chair of a Consortium institution also send a letter.

The next person recommended an interim measure of allowing a language instructor to work in the classroom with a certified teacher. The model already exists under the School Act.

A participant noted the use of the words *teacher* and *instructor* seemingly interchangeably in the consultation guide. She asked that language use be changed to reflect the broader “whole student” role of the teacher.

A participant noted that an FSL teacher needs to be able to communicate with a francophone colleague in order to organize exchanges. Another suggested that links between local francophone communities would meet the goals of an exchange program—having an everyday experience of French culture—without necessitating the cost and liability issues involved with travel.

Some participants identified the need for teacher assessment. “If we had an assessment tool for students, we would expect teachers to pass with flying colours,” one person said. The teacher assessment tool must also test for pedagogy competency.

Participants looked at the upcoming second language initiative in Alberta. Some boards have already identified qualified teachers who are competent in a second language and who can enhance their skills with professional development in second language pedagogy. There is a concerted effort at Alberta universities to produce the teachers who will be needed in the classrooms.

One person suggested university exchanges and distance programming could help address the lack of professors who can teach subject areas in French. Universities already conduct academic exchanges in other disciplines. It will be important to provide support to academics who come to teach in French and find themselves quite isolated in the university and wider community.

A participant noted the complicated matter of Alberta teachers who themselves are not advocates of second languages. “We have second language teachers ignored by their colleagues,” he said.

It would help to have a collaboration between boards, Alberta Learning, and universities to attend and train teachers.

An e-mail respondent highlighted the difficulty of finding competent teachers, especially in rural areas. Teachers often teach split classes in all the core subjects. It is very difficult, if not impossible, to find a teacher qualified to teach all subjects. A French speaking teaching assistant would help, but funding again becomes an issue.

Rural Alberta also requires greater financial support for smaller or part-time programs. The \$1,462.16 of extra funding given for French immersion and FSL programs does not cover the cost of a set of textbooks, never mind a teacher or teacher assistant.

Respondents were divided on the use of technology to deliver second language instruction. One pointed out that the province has a number of small rural schools that will have significant difficulty attracting qualified teachers to teach French when it becomes mandatory in Alberta. Therefore, alternative solutions—including distance/online capabilities—will be needed in order to provide qualified instruction for students. One respondent urged further exploration of these possibilities while another said that although technology may be useful, it is not the best way to deliver second language instruction. This is particularly difficult given the nature of many rural French immersion programs.

Provision for networking would allow FSL teachers from across a region to share ideas and provide support to one another. They also must be given the necessary time to do this. Without this support, the Action Plan will not be sustainable in the long run.

School board trustees, superintendents, directors of instruction, and even school board principals often find themselves responsible for FSL programs—and, with the Action Plan, for promoting and improving these programs—with little or no knowledge or understanding of second language learning. They need to hear about the research from a policy (not a pedagogical) perspective and share best/promising practices with their peers. They need to learn how to present information about FSL to parents and the public.

A respondent noted that teachers would have trouble with the statement, “Competency certificates for teachers should have to be renewed.” Commenting that teachers may not be open to being “tested” on their abilities, he asked if another way could be found to encourage continuing professional development in language competency.

Finally, a participant suggested that teachers be involved in the consultation.

### **Question 3: Public opinion and community context**

**What are the dimensions of a community-based campaign to promote FSL instruction and support Canada's Vision for 2013 objectives? What are the first steps, and who should be involved?**

**Recommendations**

- Invite resource business, sports, arts, and cultural leaders to be part of a community-based campaign to promote FSL instruction.
- Invite the Francophone Chamber of Commerce to participate.
- Use the media to promote this initiative.

**Discussion**

Community support is key to promoting bilingualism, said several respondents. Alberta Learning, starting in 2006, is mandating the study of a second language in Grade 4 to be continued until Grade 9. This has caused some concern at the board, school, and community levels regarding availability of teachers and obtaining the necessary resources. Now is the time for boards to prepare for 2006 and ensure Alberta Learning provides the necessary funds and resources.

A respondent said that it takes an entire village to raise a child. "When we speak about introducing additional programming into the school system we always run the risk of alienating a part of the population who believes that this new addition will take away from what they have or what they are experiencing. How do we ensure that all children in the village are being looked after? We have many students in our school system who are not ready to learn upon entering the school system at age 5. What assistance is being made on a consistent basis to help these children and their families?" Although Head Start programs exist, they are not available on a provincial basis and second language training will be mandatory in Grade 4 beginning in 2006. What about First Nations people: "How do we break the cycle of early school leaving?"

Noting that this consultation only explored the education recommendations from the National Symposium, a participant suggested the Consortium invite resource people from the business, arts, sports and culture sectors to future meetings to discuss other areas of the consultation guide.

Another participant agreed, suggesting the Francophone Chamber of Commerce could speak on their *l'autre belle province* campaign. Another suggested inviting university students who went through core and immersion programs to discuss their experiences and needs.

Canada's reputation as a world leader in second language research should be emphasized. People should be shown research demonstrating that second language helps with first language skills. "Using part of your Language Arts time for a second language is a valuable way to go," explained a participant. "We are not destroying first languages." Any media campaign must go beyond the one-time launch of an initiative and be ongoing throughout the year for several years.

The next person suggested a media campaign show a direct link to everyday life, especially to economics. The campaign could highlight real stories of business success that stem from the

person's knowledge and use of a second language.

Another person said it is important to institute a method of acknowledging, of symbolizing what FSL students have accomplished. A second person agreed, noting that it is currently impossible to have even a portion of a transcript written in French.

#### **Question 4: Institutional support and accessibility**

**What major program and policy changes would enhance FSL instruction across Canada? What are the first, most practical steps that can be taken to build a more effective, more accessible system, and who should be involved?**

#### **Recommendations**

- Urge the CMEC to develop second language competency standards for students and teachers.
- Assess whether the Public Service test could be used as a benchmark.
- Adapt the Alberta Learning Tool Kit to the national level.
- Fund any new programs adequately.

#### **Discussion**

Participants opened the dialogue with a discussion of the mandatory second language requirement being introduced in Alberta. Students can select from among seven languages but must select one. "We're expecting resistance," a participant explained. The government will have to conduct a media campaign to explain the benefits of second language learning. "If a second language is not seen as relevant to communities, not seen as purposeful, this is going to be tough," she said.

Participants discussed the particular difficulties for FSL in a province so far from a place where French is the majority language. There will be pockets of people who resist but it won't be widespread," she predicted. "Over time, second language initiatives will develop a culture in Alberta that will help all languages."

"The second language initiative will grow second language job opportunities for Alberta students," said a participant. Currently, many Alberta FSL graduates have to go to Ottawa or look for work with the federal government. There will be a dramatic increase in the need for FSL teachers. Business can be involved to demonstrate the real life business advantage of a second language. "There's a chance now of keeping our bright lights," he said.

A participant suggested the Alberta Learning Tool Kit could be adapted for the national level. The tool kit provides marketing material for different audiences, including administrators and teachers. Reproduction rights could be purchased from Alberta Learning.

Another suggested the federal government could make licenses for satellite service providers conditional on the inclusion of a second language station. “And not buried at the high end of the dial either,” he said. Having easy access to programming in different languages is part of what makes second language attainment more common in Europe.

“It’s the idea of making a second language, in this case French, an everyday fact of life,” a participant said.

Developing competency levels for both students and teachers is of critical importance. A participant asked if CMEC (Council of Ministers of Education, Canada) would agree to it. He suggested Ministers of Education could agree to develop common norms across Canada, which would also help in the development of assessment tools.

A participant suggested the Public Service test could provide a starting point for assessing the competencies of incoming teachers. Others agreed, recommending that CMEC examine existing assessment tools (Public Service and Immigration tests) and agree on what to modify. Edmonton public schools used the Public Service test with 95 students last year and are planning to test 1000 students this year, including core and immersion students, rural and urban schools. The only criterion is that the school has 15 students in core Grade 12 French. The Edmonton experience can provide a baseline of data.

Another suggestion was for CMEC to pull together people with curriculum expertise to review the existing documents and make recommendations for modification. After reaching this consensus within a few meetings, each expert could talk with the education ministry in his or her own area. Something could be ready by the June following the 2006 implementation. A participant suggested assessment specialists be brought together in the same manner.

A group member identified a significant barrier to the use or correct use of French language oral assessment tools—the teacher’s own comfort level with the language. Another issue is to ensure the tool recognizes the diversity within the oral language, as French has regional variations, just as English does (Canadian French is different from French French, which is different from Belgium French, etc.). The assessment tools will also have to be clear about their standard of assessment: is the goal to be able to communicate or to have eliminated one’s English accent?

Participants recognized the potential difficulty of getting all representatives of CMEC to agree on these complex questions. A delegate suggested the process should move forward with even a few provinces on board. Another disagreed, stressing the need for participation from both Western and Eastern provinces so that the standards could not be dismissed as regional or Western. A third person pointed to the recent success of CMEC’s pan-Canadian francization project.

Another person expressed her hope that this effort would be recognized as needing continual and long-term actions and resources. “In Canada, the reality is that we’ll always be promoting second languages,” she said. The next person agreed, noting that there are episodic and periodic flashpoints where bilingualism comes to the forefront of Canadian public life.

A participant interjected: “Flashpoint? It seems like flashback to me.” Teacher competency in language and in pedagogy was discussed twenty years ago. “Maybe the hope is there is more political interest this time,” she said.

Others agreed, seeing this as an opportunity to reframe the issue as a fact of life, a subject as important as any other subject in the school system. It is important to remember that enrolment is currently on an upswing in Alberta, with more boys this time than girls enrolling.

“We’re starting to tap into the second wave of French immersion students,” a participant explained. Their parents could provide part of the success story for the media campaign.

## **Business**

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### **Question 5**

**Is there scope for ongoing collaboration between the business and education sectors to increase the proportion of high school graduates with a working knowledge of both official languages? If so, based on the initial list of strategies developed at the National Symposium, what are the most promising opportunities for early action?**

### **Recommendations**

- Develop partnerships between businesses and educational institutes to promote the merits of bilingualism.

### **Discussion**

Participants and respondents both agreed that the business sector has a role to play in promoting French language education. Businesses are becoming increasingly aware of the economic benefits of having bilingual employees. Canada is part of a global economy and in order to be competitive, business and education have to form strong partnerships to provide opportunities for young people. A participant advocated involving the business sector to help students understand the large amount of business conducted internationally in languages other than English.

Securing the involvement of business is an important issue in Alberta. “Partnerships with business bring even more credibility,” a delegate explained. Faculté St Jean has successful business programs and will be starting a nursing program in the near future. These graduates could also provide success stories.

## **Arts, Culture, and Sports**

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### **Question 6**

**Is there scope for ongoing collaboration between the arts, culture, and sport sector and the FSL education community to increase the proportion of high school graduates with a working knowledge of both official languages? If so, based on the initial list of strategies developed at the National Symposium, what are the most promising opportunities for early action?**

#### **Recommendations**

- Promote interaction between the arts, culture, and sport sectors and the FSL education community.
- Adequately fund these programs.

#### **Discussion**

Participants emphasized the need for the classroom to take into account the current reality of French language and culture. One participant said his class would listen to French news for a few minutes each day. “We need to expose them to the reality of the speed [of the language],” he said. A list of current television shows appropriate for different levels and ages of students could be distributed to the teachers to help them extend the classroom into real experience. French language resources could be identified and shared. Currently there are no computers operating in the French language because there are no French-speaking information technology support staff.

A respondent stressed that arts, culture, and sports are the best means of helping students acquire a working knowledge of both official languages. The arts, in general, have no linguistic boundaries.

Cultural resources could be made available on a loan basis or through organizations like CAMS. Recently, the school received an information bulletin for the French Games, a national sports event for French speaking athletes. This is a step in the right direction but it falls outside the school year in July. An event of this magnitude held during the school year, even if it was only at the provincial level, would allow French immersion schools a chance to enter teams. This would provide another way of recognizing the French immersion students and raising the profile of the French language.

There is certainly scope for ongoing collaboration between the arts, culture, and sport sectors and the FSL education community. However, many of these activities call for teachers to collaborate in addition to maintaining a full teaching workload. Commenting on the extra demand this places on teachers, a respondent asked, “What’s in it for FSL teachers?” If government and business believe in the need to produce more multilingual citizens, much more money and effort is going to have to be expended.

## **Conclusions/Closing**

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As the session wrapped up, a participant asked about next steps for the report and for any indication if the recommendations would be implemented. The participants discussed the high-level participation at the National Symposium and the high-level interest in the report.