

**Canadian Parents for French**

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

**Manitoba Consultation**

**Winnipeg, Manitoba**

**March 24, 2004**

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## Introduction

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Sandy Owczar, past president, Canadian Parents for French (CPF), welcomed participants to the French as a second language (FSL) stakeholder consultation. Noting that this event had been organized at short notice, she thanked participants for rescheduling their day and for such a large turnout. She talked briefly about the information package and apologized for the fact that it was not “all in French.”

Owczar highlighted the rapid growth of French immersion in the 1970s and 1980s, followed by a dramatic decline in the 1990s. She thanked the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages and Canadian Heritage for initiating the FSL Education Stakeholder Consultations.

She spoke briefly about the national symposium, *Visions and Challenges for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, which was hosted by the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages (OCOL), at the beginning of March 2004, before outlining the six questions that flowed from the conclusions reached at this symposium. She emphasized that the purpose of today’s provincial consultation was to identify strategies to achieve the goals identified at the National Symposium, and said that the provincial recommendations identified would inform the National FSL Stakeholder’ Forum to be held in Ottawa on April 21, 2004.

Jean-Vianney Auclair, Acting Assistant Deputy Minister of Education, brought greetings on behalf of Minister Peter Bjornson, Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth and the Department of Education. He commented that it is a pleasure to work with CPF and thanked the organization for its work and commitment to FSL, and for creating and promoting FSL opportunities. The provincial Bureau de l’Éducation Française (BEF) contributes funding to CPF-MB, as does the federal government. Auclair reiterated that today, the provincial group would have an opportunity to take its strategies to a national level.

Jacqueline Gosselin of BEF, reported on her experience as one of the three Manitoba attendees at the National Symposium, *Visions and Challenges for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. The Symposium included over one hundred people from across Canada, with representation from education (educators and students), CPF, arts, culture, sport, business, and government, including several federal and provincial ministers. The focus was FSL and bilingualism. Gosselin recalled that the guest speaker, His Excellency John Ralston Saul, delivered the message that bilingualism places Canada in a unique continental position.

Gosselin also described the message of the Honourable Pierre Pettigrew, Minister of Health, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister responsible for Official Languages. Minister Pettigrew confirmed the federal government’s commitment to bilingualism, a commitment that was substantiated when the Prime Minister appointed him as Canada’s first minister responsible for Official Languages. The minister spoke about the challenges, the values, and the importance of two official languages. Language duality is part of Canada’s national identity and at the same time, helps Canada compete globally, giving it dual access to markets. The minister

acknowledged that the Action Plan is the product of input by the partners and he stressed the federal commitment to enact it.

Gosselin discussed the four key challenges identified. Participants were divided into three groups to discuss areas of challenges and to identify strategies to overcome these challenges. Gosselin closed by telling the group that she was proud to be a Manitoba representative and that “Manitoba is on the forefront of getting the Action Plan going.”

Owczar explained that the facilitator, Sylvia Jansen, had been admitted into the hospital the previous evening. She then introduced and thanked Jansen’s replacement, Carol Fletcher. Fletcher introduced herself before recapping the four key challenges.

## 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

- Promote bilingualism by educating parents and students, partnering with career and guidance counsellors, bringing administration on board, and working with the media.
- Research public perceptions on the value of FSL.
- Shift from a focus on French immersion to a focus on bilingualism.

### Discussion

The first response was that “we need to educate parents more.” There is a sense that parents have preconceived notions and that their enthusiasm wanes, or that they are intimidated when their child’s language skills move beyond the parents’ comprehension. Another group stressed the need to reach out to parents at an early level (elementary) and continue that connection. One suggestion was for CPF to send pamphlets out with report cards. Another observation was that there should be opportunities for entry into middle and late immersion (i.e., entry opportunities at different grades).

Another group suggested that there should be a shift from French immersion and learning French, to becoming bilingual. As well, CPF should promote the value of bilingualism and all parents and interested parties should promote the “advantages” of having a second language,

increased job opportunities, cognitive skills, and intelligence enhancement. Other participants supported this and one said, “We need to broaden the value of FSL beyond employment opportunities.”

There were several comments on the appropriateness of marketing FSL. In fact, participants at one table stated that “marketing” was an inappropriate term. A participant urged others to “resist marketing language and resist seeing ourselves as consumers.” Another agreed, saying that given the intrinsic value of FSL, it should not be sold “like Pepsi.” Instead, it is better to educate people, rather than sell the idea like a product. It is important to get people to think deeply about their values and to teach tolerance and openness.

Several members argued against this, noting that “back in the 70s, French was marketed, but when that stopped, participation dropped.” One participant said that although others may not like marketing, bilingualism has to be promoted through the media. One of the first steps should be research on public perceptions on the value of FSL.

There was also some discussion about mandating bilingualism. Bilingualism is rooted in politics—Canada is a country with two official languages and some participants argued in favour of mandatory bilingualism. One participant noted that Canada is a multilingual country and that a second language (not necessarily French) should be compulsory.

One group looked at the retention issue and noted that many students drop out of immersion programs after Grade 8. Children need internal motivation or they will not carry on. One suggestion was to focus on school career/guidance councillors—partner with them, and teach them the value of bilingualism. Another participant stressed the need to focus on those in administrative roles and teach them the value of bilingualism. There was consensus that immersion programs tend to flourish in environments where administrators believe in and support the program.

Several participants spoke about creating new momentum and agreed on the need for renewed enthusiasm. Celebrating successes was one of the tools suggested as a way to encourage participation.

This session wrapped up with several comments on the government’s role in promoting FSL. There was a strong sense that the government, especially Heritage Canada, has a role in promoting bilingualism. “The government needs to define ‘functionally bilingual’ and put dollars into it,” said one participant. Another added, “and put more dollars in a beefed-up French program.”

## **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

- Fund universities and specifically, fund faculties of education so they can provide FSL teacher training.
- Develop national standards for French teachers, and French immersion and core French programs.
- Develop more crossover and points of entry between the two programs.
- Increase the starting wages of teachers and ensure that teachers' salaries are competitive.
- Develop a strategy to attract and retain French teachers in rural and northern areas.
- Recognize the valuable contribution of teachers.
- Mentor first-year teachers with successful, senior teachers.
- Consider life experiences and volunteer work when choosing applicants for teacher's college.
- Promote more opportunities for French-speaking graduates to study and work in French.

## Discussion

During the discussion about attracting and training FSL teachers, participants questioned if there was hope for a system that gives the gift of bilingualism, and then withdraws it with inadequate support. Repeatedly, people requested that teaching and learning French become mandatory.

Universities and faculties of education lack the financial resources to adequately train professors who in turn can train teachers to teach FSL.

From the teachers' perspective, the government needs to provide more opportunities for FSL teachers to improve their linguistic skills through travel, and to make a decent wage. Bursaries could help French-speaking students continue their education, rather than having to work to pay off already incurred educational loans.

There are mandatory standards of fluency for French Immersion teachers in Manitoba. Participants called for the establishment of national standards and specific strategies to make this happen. It is essential to understand two points: in Manitoba, core French is part of the curriculum from Grade 4 to Grade 8, and French immersion is a separate stream of learning. More crossovers and points of entry need to be established to enable students to enter French immersion after taking core French for some years.

Certain school boards have eliminated French teachers, saying they are not economically feasible. In their place, these boards have mandated homeroom teachers in elementary school to teach French, even if the teachers cannot speak it.

A participant pointed out that since students leave university with an average debt load of between \$15,000 and \$20,000, they are forced to consider the most lucrative careers possible. It concerned him that teachers' salaries start at \$38,000, and with only a further year of study, these same students can become medical doctors with a much higher earning capacity. He recommended that the starting wage for teachers be increased and that these wages be competitive. In real terms, teachers' salaries have decreased 15% in recent years after the effects

of inflation. (It was not known whether this also applied to other professions/areas of work). Higher salaries would motivate students.

Programs exist to forgive student loans for doctors in rural areas and northern cities. These same centres struggle to attract and retain competent teachers, especially French-speaking teachers. However, no comparable government program exists to forgive loans for teachers. When faced with this discrepancy, the government responded that it was not the employer—school divisions make the offers to teachers. A participant suggested that these demands/decisions have to be made at a higher political level.

One of the smaller table groups, comprised primarily of non-teachers, suggested that salary was not the main issue—rather, it is students' perceptions of what a teaching job entails. Teaching is not valued as a profession by many who see teaching jobs as an incredible amount of work. In the short term, reward programs for teachers would help. These would not necessarily have to be monetary, but could be geared at recognition of teaching skills and aimed at the value of teaching contributions to society.

One suggestion was to establish a mentoring system within classrooms whereby teachers would mentor students interested in teaching.

Others observed that the first three years of teaching can be difficult. A participant said that if teacher practicums were longer, student teachers would have a better idea of what to expect when they have their own classrooms. This would also provide classroom teachers with more support and could help both students and teachers. Research has shown that early support counters early disappointment, which leads to attrition. The Sunrise School Division successfully pairs first-year teachers with more senior teachers.

In response to a suggestion that peers and faculty could guide students toward teaching French, a participant noted that there are provincial requirements. However, once students choose their subject of expertise, they can teach anything, depending on market demand, after graduation. They make their initial choices by getting a science or arts undergraduate degree.

There are no provincial guidelines about the level of fluency needed to teach French or to become an FSL instructor. Certain school divisions have addressed this issue by establishing their own standards.

Another suggestion was to promote teaching as a career by making it more accessible to more people. Candidates who have not achieved specified GPA requirements, could also be considered based on their life experiences and volunteer work. It is becoming increasingly difficult to get into education using GPA as the sole determinant. The enrolment cap is based on provincial funding and human resources.

A student who takes his or her first degree in French often has no opportunity to take an education degree in French, and can lose fluency during that time. Similarly, students who complete an English degree after graduating from French immersion, often find that their English degree compromises their fluency and eligibility.

A former teacher said that it was only after leaving the field of teaching that he realized that he had many transferable skills and was not “just a teacher. ... We have to find a way of helping people claim who and what they are.”

### **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**

- Develop a coordinated, cooperative effort to promote FSL instruction.
- Use FSL graduates and prominent citizens as ambassadors to promote French language instruction.
- Develop initiatives, such as distance education, that cross jurisdictions. This will require cooperation on a national level.

#### **Discussion**

The responses to this question began with the role of government, and a strong sense that government should be doing more. A coordinated, cooperative effort—“a broader national vision”—is needed. Stakeholders need to network (on an ongoing basis), lobby both the provincial and federal governments to convince them of the importance of FSL. This discussion led again to the idea of pushing for legislation mandating two-language instruction. Additionally, there was discussion that CBC, the national public broadcaster, could promote bilingualism on a national level.

One participant described successful enrolment programs and suggested that CPF chapters could help increase enrolment by prospecting parents of kindergarten entrants. Another added that advocates should “sell and celebrate FSL.” Young people who are bilingual have a role to play as ambassadors. They could talk to the parents of younger students and share their experiences and perceptions of the benefits of FSL. More importantly, they could come back and talk to younger children in a very effective manner.

The discussion again focused on the role of school staff in the promotion of FSL. There should be an emphasis on recruiting and training bilingual resource teachers, guidance counsellors, librarians, and all support positions. This led to discussion about leadership and the need for bilingual administrators. If the superintendent takes the lead and promotes FSL, it is more likely to happen. “If the division has vision, parents will recognize this,” said one participant.

One of the groups suggested promotion efforts should target young people and young adults, rather than waiting until they are parents. For the message to be sustained it has to begin early and be ongoing.

Using prominent people as ambassadors to promote bilingualism was another suggestion. This could be part of a marketing strategy.

A participant pointed out that one of the greatest obstacles to FSL education is jurisdictional responsibility. By legislation, education is a provincial responsibility, but bilingualism and language policy are national in scope. Provincially, there is limited capacity for FSL education training at a Masters or PhD level. A mechanism is required to pull the resources together and collaborate on a national level. Another participant proposed that consideration be given to distance education on a national level. "We need an initiative that crosses boundaries," he said.

The final comments focused on working cooperatively and creating links across the nation. One example cited was the way in which the healthcare profession has connected.

#### **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**

- Pressure the federal and provincial governments to address the issue of jurisdictional responsibility.
- Explore the possibility of using the Internet to promote a pan-Canadian post-graduate FSL teaching program.
- Define the word "bilingualism."

#### **Discussion**

The real obstacle to developing a national system is Canada's division of jurisdiction responsibility. As education is a provincial concern, the development of Masters programs in French language teaching is compromised, as is the possibility of developing a PhD program to be delivered via distance education. A participant suggested that CPF pressure the government since it has a stake in the outcome and already has a national organization. The Internet is a good vehicle to connect groups beyond provincial borders. Many European countries already have a national policy about all students being proficient in a second language.

Taking this approach to language studies will also lead to opportunities for First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and other language groups. Establishing a national policy of mandatory core French or French immersion would make the country bilingual. Bilingualism would become part of

Canadian citizenship. However, participants acknowledged that during these fiscally conservative years, Canadians have already backed away from that decision.

Many provinces will not put extra money into French language study, which has been a contentious part of Canadian history. Some politicians find it exceptionally difficult to defend mandatory French in school, although this should be done, argued one participant.

Participants debated the merits of forming a lobby to support politicians who uphold the principles of bilingualism, but did not reach consensus. They noted that sadly, students who are expelled for wearing pyjamas to school make the front page of the newspaper, while student achievements are bumped to page 17. The media is more concerned about what students wear to school than it is about the quality of education. This compromises this group's ability to make this an issue for politicians, even if they are interested.

Participants focused on the meaning of the word "bilingualism." Does it mean reading and writing French? The ability to speak French? Being able to work professionally in French? Going to the government office and choosing a language of service? Citizenship and Immigration Canada talks about levels of bilingualism or proficiency in relation to a certain activity, but does not define bilingualism.

"We must be realistic about money being put into French language and core French groups," said a participant. The problem of working in various technical fields, such as sound and recording, was noted. It can be difficult to determine words in current usage. For example, a Manitoban constructed a resource of Latin, French, and English words to label all Manitoba's mammals. It enabled people to go bird watching and to talk about it in French and in English. However, the document is not widely available.

Valuing varying degrees of bilingualism leads to social responsibility, said participants, cautioning that they must be open to promotional opportunities and careful not to be exclusive. This group should be more inclusive in who it reaches out to—it should reach out not just to the government, but also to other members of society. "This is not a one-shot deal; it is part of lifelong learning," observed a participant. "You don't take one course and become bilingual. The type of words that government and we as educators use is important. If we didn't speak French for three years but existed in another language, would we keep the same level of competency?" They acknowledged the difficulty facing French-speaking Canadians outside centres where French is spoken. Language is both a process and a tool for communication.

There was little discussion about the importance of conversational French as an important measure of bilingualism, although there was an acknowledgement that students who only study core French have a difficult time becoming bilingual. Participants did agree that they must first resolve jurisdictional issues regarding core funding.

## **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**

- Promote bilingualism locally.
- Acknowledge the economic contribution that bilingualism makes to the province.
- Profile and support bilingual businesses.
- Use Junior Achievement to promote bilingualism.
- Explore the possibility of providing tax breaks to bilingual businesses.

#### **Discussion**

Discussion on this question began with the thought that there should be some research into how business and industry in Manitoba value bilingualism. This would provide a local perspective. There is a strong sense that “things bilingual” are imposed from outside the province. Bilingualism has to be promoted from within Manitoba. Business has to be part of it—it has to see the benefits of bilingualism and acknowledge that bilingualism contributes to the economic life of the province. Manitobans need to “name it, claim it, and celebrate it.”

One table talked about the Rotary Club and the Career Symposium, noting that there is no focus on language. There is an opportunity to either run a parallel job fair or partner with the Rotary Club. This would provide an ideal opportunity to highlight bilingualism. This would not only involve business, but at the same time give bilingualism credibility in the eyes of the students.

Many people talked about how non-supportive the business community is. “Business does not put their money where their mouth is,” said a participant. The group engaged in a litany of questions: Why hasn’t business stepped forward with money? Why doesn’t it offer scholarships? Why don’t businesses hire bilingual students? Why doesn’t business get more involved with work placements? One of the strongest criticisms was that most businesses do not promote bilingual service, even when they have bilingual staff.

Some people countered that it is time to “get the dialogue going”—that it is time to get out and promote the benefits of bilingualism in the business community. “We need to knock on business doors,” said one. Participants commented that they should take the initiative, approach the business community, and form partnerships. This will help to increase awareness in the business community and provide an opportunity to let businesses know how they can help. Noting that there are a number of bilingual businesses in Manitoba, one group proposed that they be profiled and supported.

One thought was that government could offer a bilingual bonus by providing a tax break or grant to bilingual businesses. As well, there could be incentives to hire bilingual employees. Manitoba Tourism promotions such as *Manitoba First* could support bilingualism, not only through advertising, but also by encouraging the retail and service sectors to use French—if only to say “bonjour” first.

A youth participant suggested promoting bilingualism through Junior Achievement, which has clubs in both English and French. This could provide an excellent vehicle to reach young entrepreneurs and could have long-term benefits. There could also be more partnering with businesses and schools, especially FSL schools. Another idea was to have bilingual students talk to service clubs about the benefits of bilingualism programs and the positive things they had encountered.

One of the students talked about the need to make technical language more accessible and promote what is available. This led to discussion about resources and the need to package and promote an inventory of technical language.

## 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

- Provide adequate support to ensure that public institutions such as art galleries and museums can offer bilingual services.
- Encourage public institutions to offer bilingual experiences outside the classroom.
- Encourage children to take bilingual programs such as swimming and art classes.

### Discussion

To many Manitobans, bilingualism is something that happens outside the province. Participants examined the breadth of cultural resources, noting that there is very little sports activity in French, with the exception of French CBC (Radio Canada).

Participants agreed on the importance of making bilingualism or French speaking part of life in the province—bringing it beyond the classroom. Going to a place outside the school where French is spoken provides students with a wider French context.

All agreed that Radio Canada was an excellent resource, particularly for cultural events in Winnipeg. Many said they watched or listened to French television or radio.

Several representatives from the cultural industry spoke about challenges similar to those brought up in earlier discussions, with economics being a prime concern. Too often, promises to offer bilingual services or experiences are not accompanied by resources, and little happens. For example, it would be ideal if the Winnipeg Art Gallery (WAG)—whose mandate is to offer bilingual services—could actually offer all services in both French and English. The Bureau de l'éducation française, a provincial organization, pays for services for youth at the WAG and the Manitoba Museum. However, when push comes to shove, money goes to health and other crises. The arts rely more on businesses and communities for funding. The Winnipeg Art Gallery is only truly bilingual when it has a federal exhibit.

Resources are a major issue. It is hard enough to find human resources in the arts because there are not enough economic job incentives to entice young into the arts. A crisis looms—the pool of qualified people is already shrinking, and if requirements for bilingual staff are added, there will be fewer people to fill the jobs. A participant said that whenever her organization advertises a job opening, it receives one or two applications, only one of which is usually qualified for the position. The WAG is rethinking how it operates, hoping to retain the quality of programs for which it has a reputation and fulfilling its mandate of providing education in French.

Students are told that the Manitoba Museum, the Winnipeg Art Gallery, and the Children's Museum offer a bilingual experience outside the classroom. In reality, however, they do not have the necessary funds and there is a dearth of volunteers. These cultural institutions are working with university professors in an effort to attract more student volunteers. If a bilingual requirement were added, the resource would no doubt dry up. Participants did agree that the institutions play an important role in providing a bilingual experience outside the classroom.

Relating her experience as a francophone singer/songwriter, a participant described the difficulty of living and working in French, and the need for resources to attract bigger audiences. The Société franco-manitoban (SFM), a French-speaking cultural centre in St. Boniface, was acknowledged as a great resource in this area. Daniel St. Vincent liaises with outside agencies, both French and English. He talked about how important it is for students to have funds to go on trips and live a francophone experience. He also described an amazing number of community activities that take place in French. For instance, in just 15 days in March there were 25 art exhibits and 7 plays.

St. Vincent said that he is often asked how students can plug into the francophone community in Manitoba. The SFM has a Web site with resources to help make parents of immersion students aware of the French cultural experiences available. The SFM Web site is found at [www.sfm-mb.ca/233allo](http://www.sfm-mb.ca/233allo).

One suggestion to increase parental awareness was to send notices of upcoming events out with report cards. Another suggestion was to encourage children to take extra-curricular activities, such as swimming lessons, in French. Participants acknowledged that some parents who do not

speak French themselves can be intimidated by French-speaking activities and do not encourage their child's participation in them.

Educators must also recognize that they could do a better job of disseminating information and creating links. For example, the Department of Education has a cultural calendar but few people know of its existence. A Web portal for CPF promoted through the Department of Education could publicize information in English as well as in French. Another suggestion was for the Lighthouse program—an after-school program run by the Department of Justice for disadvantaged children—to offer some of its sports and cultural events in French or other languages.

## **Conclusions/Closing**

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Carol Fletcher described the need for accessible ports of entry into the French-speaking world where people of all ages can learn. “We cannot do it alone,” she said, noting that participants agreed with the need for government, businesses, and the wider community involvement. “We hope that in the course of the day, we have formed some networks, made some new friends, and recognized that we can represent what the future can hold.”

In direct response to Fletcher's challenge to provide bilingual experiences outside the schools, Daniel St. Vincent offered to visit schools to let parents know what is available.

Gerard Gagnon, Manitoba Representative, Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, spoke first in French calling the task ahead “most exciting and challenging.” The six questions posed led to “many inspirational ideas and it is difficult at times to decide which strategy or decision would be best to achieve our goals.” The first steps forward have been identified. “Will it be possible to reach the ambitious idea of doubling bilingual graduates? If a blueprint is mapped out or all our ideas are instituted, I would say unreservedly ‘yes,’” he concluded. “We have cared very long about this endeavour and now I want to thank everyone for their productive work.”

Participants noted that the French-speaking community in Manitoba has become more open to making links with the English-speaking community and was making a more concerted effort to reach out. This has happened only in the last five to six years and is seen as a very positive change. “Still more links need to happen but it is a powerful beginning,” said one of the attendees.

The representative from the Children's Museum noted that the meeting had opened up the opportunity for her to advertise her new program to an entire French-speaking segment of participants. Musing about the possibility of adding French artists to the roster, she advocated for the development of more linkages.