

**Canadian Parents for French**

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

**Nova Scotia Consultation**

**Halifax, Nova Scotia**

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## Introduction

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David Brennick, president of Canadian Parents for French Nova Scotia (CPF-NS), expressed his appreciation that so many turned out on short notice—a better response than in some larger jurisdictions. There are 1700 members of CPF in Nova Scotia (one-tenth the national total), with more than 20 CPF chapters. The organization has played an advocacy role in providing summer camps, resources, and the like.

Nova Scotia is the fourth Atlantic province to carry out this stakeholder consultation. All results will be compiled in mid-April.

Brennick noted that the practical value of French as a Second Language (FSL) should not outweigh the intrinsic value for our personal lives. He then introduced Rhonda Dean, executive director, and Joanne Turner, chapter liaison officer.

Dean summarized the events that led to today's meeting: the government of Canada's Action Plan for Official Languages provides a strong commitment to support second-language instruction, with the aim of doubling within 10 years the proportion of young Canadians who are functionally bilingual.

She explained that in Nova Scotia, the immersion population has continued to increase at a steady rate in both early and late immersion over the past few years. The percentage of immersion students has increased to 8.24% in 2001–2002 from 4.97% in 1995–1996. The overall student population has decreased by over 6.5% since 1995.

However, core French enrolment has declined steadily each year, resulting in a 5% decrease since 1995–1996. Extended core enrolment peaked in 1998–1999, but has declined in recent years, in part due to access to immersion. Overall, French student enrolment has declined since 1998–1999, despite the growth in immersion.

Dean explained that this consultation would address three key areas: education, business, and arts, culture, and sport. Questions will be posed for discussion, and key points relating to the questions and recommendations for specific actions will be presented. Participants will determine which recommendations will be most effective in addressing the questions, and will identify further actions to achieve these goals.

Based on the group's input, a provincial position paper reflecting Nova Scotia's specific needs will be drafted. The report will be presented at a national meeting in April.

Brennick introduced Trudy Comeau, vice president of CPF National. Referring to the Toronto meetings, Comeau shared comments from His Excellency John Ralston Saul, who referred to “an education revolution in Canada,” with French immersion playing a vital role. Denis Coderre, President of the Privy Council, said that our diversity is what unites us. The Honourable Pierre Pettigrew, Minister of Health and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister responsible

for Official Languages, affirmed the commitment of the Prime Minister to an action plan that *will be* implemented. Comeau introduced and explained a French language renewal project launched in Edmonton that is having considerable success, resulting in a 41% increase in enrolment in kindergarten French immersion year over year, with much higher retention rates than before.

Mary Jess MacDonald, president of the Nova Scotia School Boards Association, said that His Excellency John Ralston Saul had left her with the thought, “Language is the sack that you put your culture into.” MacDonald reaffirmed the commitment that she made in Toronto to work with CPF and to pursue the advancement of bilingualism in her capacity as President of the NSSBA.

Brennick explained the consultation process to follow: there are four questions on education. Each group will take two questions, and will have 45 minutes to discuss and make their recommendations relative to each question.

## **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**

Participants identified their three top priorities:

1. Early and ongoing promotion of FSL programs;
2. Ongoing parental supports and compulsory high school language credit (these two tied for second place); and
3. Marketing model—target audience, good product, promotion, evaluation.

Participants also made a number of other suggestions:

- Offer peer support (between and within schools, graduates).
- Encourage more dialogue between post-secondary and public school systems.
- Establish mini-immersion sessions for core French that are offered regularly.
- Establish community language centres for francophiles.
- Develop media promotion—publicize successes.
- Promote a bilingual life for francophiles.
- Give students exposure to French culture.
- Make French education fun.

- Have good programs, good teachers.
- Establish early and ongoing promotion of FSL programs.
- Develop long-range planning and accessibility (bus, local sites).
- Establish sponsorship for French camps for disadvantaged students by service organizations.
- Explore other models—target audience, good product, promotion, and “marketing plan,” evaluation.
- Make FSL a genuine experience through camps, and exchanges, for example.
- Create a CPF-facilitated database of resources of performers.
- Structure trips around learning outcomes.
- Solicit school board support for marketing ventures.
- Espouse the merits of speaking a second language in the global economy. A second language provides insight into other cultures and is an asset when negotiating with people of other nationalities.

## Discussion

Participants discussed marketing approaches. They decided that the best approach would be to identifying the target market, bring stakeholder representatives onside, and develop a plan that could include successful programs such as the Edmonton model. The endorsement of school board members was seen as an essential component in order for the marketing campaign to be successful. CPF needs to be an equal partner, as well as the community, which includes parents, businesses, the media, pre-schools, senior school board administration, teachers, school administrators, deputy ministers, municipal departments, Home and School associations, the Youth Secretariat, the Department of Education (French program services), and French consultants. One participant noted that the Nova Scotia Francophone Federation is focusing on pre-school aged children, starting at birth.

One suggestion was to provide a CD so that parents can learn the language and help their children (since they can't read French, they can learn via audio). This CD should include testimonials from parents. Another suggestion was to increase French holdings and activities at libraries. Libraries are keen to reach out and are an excellent resource.

A participant said that the focus should not be only on immersion, but should be on bilingualism as well. Another suggested promoting education in its entirety. The province needs to create new avenues of employment, and stress the need for bilingualism.

Participants suggested promoting the fact that bilingual workers receive higher pay. For example, call centres pay unilingual employees \$10 per hour, while bilingual workers receive \$15. Bilingualism brings more job opportunities and results in higher literacy skills and greater cognitive skills, since learning a language uses another part of the brain. One participant told the story of his daughter dropping off her résumé at the airport, but not expecting an interview (she was dressed in sweatpants at the time). When airport personnel learned that she was bilingual, they interviewed her on the spot and hired her as a bilingual security guard—a job she kept while going through college.

One problem in Nova Scotia is that most residents can go for weeks without hearing anyone speak French. Exposing students to a French-speaking environment and keeping it alive is an uphill battle.

Katimavik was cited as an example of a wonderful learning experience.

More effort is needed to promote French-language education in post-secondary institutions. All too often, guidance counsellors do not promote FSL; there is huge pressure to go into science or math. Participants discussed the best way to promote a Bachelor of Arts degree in a technological world, noting that one can learn a computer program in three months, but not a language. French should not be seen as a subject but as a skill to enhance life.

## **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**

Participants identified their three top priorities:

1. Recruit FSL graduates to Bachelor of Education programs, and ensure FSL teachers are qualified and capable (these two tied for first place);
2. Promote early hiring and better retention (mentorship), and provide promotion packages for bilingual students for post-secondary level (these two tied for second place); and
3. Offer incentives for pursuing an educational career (e.g., use the Shoppers Drug Mart model that pays students to learn pharmacy).

Participants also made a number of other suggestions:

- Develop greater federal–provincial connection and awareness.
- Encourage early hiring and retention for supply teachers; mentorship and technology, job fairs.
- Encourage post-secondary language development.
- Monitor and support B Ed students through university.
- Encourage cooperation between guidance and administration.
- Promote teaching French as a valued career choice.
- Ensure that senior high scheduling leaves room for French (if programs are cut, it's always the language programs, not the science or math programs).
- Develop and encourage ongoing professional development.
- Review courses at post-secondary level.

- Target bilingual students in other disciplines; show that education is a viable career choice.
- Ensure board FSL staff has interviewed FSL teachers hired at the school level.
- Offer science and social studies in French outside Université Sainte-Anne.

## Discussion

Participants discussed the fact that teachers need support systems. Traditionally, French teachers try to take students to Quebec—one participant took 42 students to Quebec. This kind of effort needs much more support and funding to avoid teacher burnout. Programs to raise funds are needed.

Although there is evidence that mentoring programs for FSL teachers are valuable, no formal targeted mentorship programs currently exist. One participant said that the FSL Monitor program makes an “unbelievable difference.” In the Monitor program, post-university students work with teachers to provide linguistic and cultural activities. The response has been “extremely positive”—the program provides an opportunity for students to see French “as a real language.” Quebec offers the same program, but in English. Participants asked that the program be reinstated at the university level.

Long-time core French teachers should be given more respect—their classrooms are the first ones to be moved.

One participant asked how a student teacher could obtain sufficient education to teach. Another said that the five-week summer school program is inadequate preparation, and called for the sabbaticals to be reinstated. “We were counting on sabbaticals to implement an extended skills program,” he said.

Participants noted that one school can only handle 25 French students. If 70% of the students want to study French (for example), both levels of government should respond and make it possible.

The next generation of FSL teachers should be equally qualified to teach core and immersion; the dichotomy should be eliminated.

## 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

Participants identified their top three priorities:

1. Coordinate efforts to promote the values of FSL, in effect delivering “one message.”

2. Develop language skills at the post-secondary level.
3. Create promotional packages for bilingual students at post-secondary level.

Participants also made a number of other suggestions:

- Recruit an identifiable spokesperson for publicity campaigns who would be a “meaningful champion” for the promotion of FSL.
- Provide clear information about “what it means to be a second-language learner” to school principals and guidance counselors as well as students.
- Establish standards for quality teacher training to instil confidence in educators.
- Recognize the success of efforts in other jurisdictions (Edmonton, for example).
- Recognize the successes of FSL students.
- Develop a key message for a promotional campaign.
- Develop partnerships to take the message forward.
- Carry out a plan to monitor, evaluate, and adjust the campaign as necessary.
- Initiate a community campaign to encourage bilingualism along the lines of the *ParticipAction* physical fitness campaign.
- Highlight the role of universities in promoting bilingual education.
- Recognize that French is not merely a subject of study but a lifelong learning commitment, and take steps to make language learning more “internalized” and engaging of the whole person.
- Institute a pilot project school exchange program for academic credit.
- Offer advanced credits at post-secondary level for bilingual students.
- Expand the successful Monitor program to the university level.
- Take steps to reduce the division between French immersion teachers and core French teachers that currently exists in many schools.

## Discussion

A participant suggested the key to this question is, “How do we make FSL real and relevant for students?” Students “have to value the opportunities they will have from knowing a second language,” he said. The most important issue for students is that programs delivered in school be relevant. “Cool comes later.” The same participant challenged the group to consider what messages are being sent in the community to cause parents to enrol children in FSL programs, as well as what messages lead students not to continue in these programs later on.

Speaking as a parent, one participant suggested targeting parents for promotion of programs, since parents make the initial decision to enrol children in programs. The concept of mastery of a second language being “cool” begins at around age 13 or 14, she said.

Noting that only about \$137 million of the projected \$700 million being allocated nationally is earmarked specifically for education, participants expressed concern about what funding would be available for programs in Nova Scotia. It was suggested that funding available for projects within the province would depend largely on what initiatives were undertaken.

Attention was given to problems experienced in promoting FSL programs now. At least some of the challenges stem from apprehension about academic outcomes. Parental misgivings over academics are another issue. “I personally knew parents who did not send children to French immersion because they didn’t think they could help them with their homework,” said one participant.

Lack of awareness about the importance of FSL programs and lack of commitment to them by school board administrations present another marketing problem. One participant noted that in his jurisdiction, “it is often parents—not school board officials—who keep the debate going on FSL programs.”

In terms of implementing a community-based campaign, one group advocated a systematic marketing-oriented approach. This would involve identifying the target market and stakeholders, and developing a marketing plan inspired by successful efforts in other jurisdictions. The group referred to a successful project undertaken in the city of Edmonton. Such a marketing campaign would be conducted as an ongoing process with continual monitoring and adjustment. There was general agreement that successes in promoting FSL educational programs and student achievement need to be acknowledged and publicized.

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

**What major program and policy changes would enhance FSL instruction in Nova Scotia? 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**

Participants identified their top three priorities:

1. Create policies to promote FSL.
2. Ensure quality and accessibility.
3. (Participants felt that following three points were of equal importance):
  - Expand curriculum options at high school level.
  - Enforce core French as a mandatory pass credit.
  - Implement a language proficiency certificate.

In addition, participants made the following suggestions:

- Provide funding to universities to enable the expansion of French classes.
- Provide students with creative educational options such as taking courses at other schools.
- Provide clearer information on policies and programs.
- Engage in meaningful consultation with stakeholders.
- Have the funding differential for FSL reflected in the classroom.
- Conduct a review of mandated courses.
- Refocus programs to create meaningful and interesting courses in FSL.
- Create FSL programs for special needs students.

- Re-evaluate senior high-level course requirements.
- Keep teachers in Nova Scotia.
- Increase funding for Monitor exchange program.
- Provide funding or scholarships for Bachelor of Education students.
- Provide a summer language bursary for high school students.
- Appraise teachers, monitors and support for retention.
- Offer non-literary courses at university level.

## **Discussion**

Many participants agreed that when considering policies, one must first clearly define the ideals and objectives at hand. One participant expressed the issue succinctly: “The ideal should be, quite simply, quality French instruction for anyone who wants it.”

Funding and commitment to programs quickly emerged as key concerns in the policy area. Noting that school and program closures—and the student transfers that result when cash-strapped programs are consolidated—are having a serious impact on teacher and student morale, one participant argued that school boards are “not sending a clear message that they value French education.” Another pointed out that a policy shift from “magnet schools” with centralized programs to a more “community-based” approach to program delivery has brought its own set of problems. Often, the smaller community-based programs lack a critical mass of students and cannot be lavishly funded. Although many parents prefer the community-based approach, they must make a choice. “We cannot have it both ways,” he cautioned.

Educators and consultants involved in program development and delivery may be willing to work within these constraints, but they first need to be aware of them. One school board consultant noted that this session marked the first time he had heard the funding dilemma faced by the provincial government expressed so concisely. The lesson from this, he suggested, is that better communication between the Department of Education and the regional school boards is needed.

Various issues with school board policies were highlighted. One problem is limitations on the number of courses students are allowed to take. An educational environment that places a greater emphasis on science and mathematics may discourage some students from continuing in French. Most participants agreed that the importance of FSL be recognized by making French a compulsory academic credit.

There was general agreement on the value of continuing studies in FSL at the university level, and considerable discussion followed. It was agreed that extension of French studies beyond the high school level should apply to post-secondary education generally rather than just university.

## 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

Participants identified their top three priorities:

1. Make bursaries available to bilingual students, on the same principle as those offered by Sobey's Inc., which combine a scholarship with a one-year employment contract
2. Participants felt that these points were of equal importance:
  - Establish a central database of jobs requiring bilingualism.
  - Promote value of FSL by providing results of research to business.
3. Wear buttons indicating bilingual ability in all workplaces where it is available.

Participants also made the following suggestions:

- Hold a job fair at which business comes into schools to discuss bilingual career opportunities.
- Recognize the value of diversity and promote diversity-training programs such as those undertaken by Michelin Tire.
- Motivate business to promote and market bilingualism.
- Encourage awareness of the global community.
- Create co-op placements and exchanges.
- Institute bilingual job shadowing.
- Formulate an agreement between English school boards and CSAP that would allow for free-flowing credits and semesters at different schools.
- Create a guide for the corporate world.
- Promote media coverage of business stories related to FSL.
- Encourage business to sponsor French events.
- Establish a bilingual proficiency certificate.
- Disseminate information on where to receive bilingual services.
- Seek an employment section in paper specifically for bilingual candidates.
- Declare Nova Scotia a bilingual province.
- Create international internships.
- Initiate a consultation process to identify needs within business, education, and government.
- Create tax incentives for FSL instruction and support.
- Encourage cultural sensitivity in campaigns and services, and cultural sensitivity training in the workplace.
- Institute a language requirement for business programs at the post-secondary level.
- Build partnerships with businesses that require bilingualism—tourism, for example.
- Encourage businesses to offer FSL awards to students or other businesses from government.

- Clarify the rationale for collaboration with business.
- Consult with the private sector to develop strategies for a business case for promoting bilingualism.
- Focus on culture as much as language skills.
- Emphasise “value of” versus “need for” bilingual services.
- Identify the bilingual services Nova Scotia can export.
- Promote bilingual services to tourists.
- Gather statistics on the impact on the bottom line; find out where the bilingual workers are.

## Discussion

Some participants took issue with the premise of this question. Commenting on the contention that unilingual companies risk losing market share and business opportunities, an educator with considerable experience in international business noted that, “as of the last time I was in Budapest, bilingualism was not an issue.” Other participants suggested that perhaps bilingualism is not an issue for the English-speaking business world precisely because it is an issue in non-English-speaking countries.

There was general agreement that if the case for bilingualism in business is to be made successfully, it needs to be put in the proper terms. For most businesses, that translates into return on investment. “If we are to develop a business case for bilingualism,” one participant cautioned, “we must be prepared to work hard to explain it.”

Many participants felt that taking measures to provide bilingual services is more likely to be viewed by most businesses as an expense rather than an investment. However, many businesses already make expenditures to accommodate people from other countries—advertising exchange rates, for example—that are clearly investments with a financial payoff. Investment in bilingualism might come to be viewed in the same manner if more companies were made aware of the potential benefits. One way of doing this, it was suggested, might be to provide regional businesses with research about the business opportunities available to bilingual firms, as well as data on finding appropriately skilled bilingual employees.

Many groups also discussed the possibility of offering tax incentives to companies that support their employees’ developing language skills.

Steps should be taken to market Nova Scotia as a place where French language services are available, particularly in the tourism industry. There was general agreement that bilingual individuals in business should identify themselves to customers with a device such as a lapel button. One group went further, suggesting that the time has come to consider making Nova Scotia an officially bilingual province.

In promoting bilingualism in business, some participants felt that abilities are more important than awards. One participant downplayed the significance of certificates. “The more certificates that are given out, “ she argued, “the less important they become.”

For many participants, questions of promoting bilingualism in business centred on ensuring that bilingual individuals are available for hire. This brought the focus back to education, with many of the same ideas—scholarships, exchanges and so on—that were advanced in other fora being suggested in this regard as well.

In recognition of the international character of multilingual business relationships, one group suggested that work internships and exchanges be extended to other French-speaking countries rather than being limited to Canada. This, it was argued, would provide students with a global business perspective. Financial sponsorship of such ventures might be sought from French-owned companies. Speaking from a university perspective, one participant suggested that CPF would be the best agency to facilitate these exchanges because “you have no political agenda.”

Several participants pointed to several business-run programs that currently exist in the community that might serve as positive examples of how business could promote bilingualism. Overall, there was substantial agreement between most of the groups on what steps should be taken to promote bilingualism in business.

## **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**

Participants identified their top three priorities:

1. Expand the Concours d’art oratoire to include writing and music, etc.
2. The following two priorities tied for second place:
  - Encourage radio stations to reserve time for French programming, with student participation.
  - Create 60-second TV vignettes on the importance of bilingualism.
3. Increase promotion by having a database of French activities.

Participants also made the following suggestions:

- Consider a Jeux de l’Acadie for francophiles of all ages and programs, such as sports, improvisation, and music.
- Bring French artists (Conseil Culturel) to schools.
- Institute French read-to-me programs at hospital for newborns.
- Provide the ALR cultural awareness kit to teachers, parents.

- Promote bilingual TV, French cable programming.
- Earmark funding for French programs.
- Institute a provincial “French Month.”
- Promote cultural centres, access to resources.
- Create a French portal.
- Bring culture into the classroom (with financial support regarding copyright).
- Ask federal institutions to provide resources as needed.
- Encourage school boards to coordinate cultural events and share costs.
- Support and include CPF.
- Bring together kids from different cultures (e.g., through Katimavik).
- Create a database of radio programs, etc., on the CPF Web site.
- Use TV, theatre, performers.
- Bring people from the cultural community into classrooms.
- Initiate a FSL teacher exchange.
- Investigate “La course autour du Canada”—filmmaker to seek out graduates.
- Encourage improvisation.
- Encourage collaboration between CSAP and English school boards for events.
- Integrate technology: virtual tours, Web cams, networking with other students.
- Create a position for a cultural liaison at the Department of Education.
- Promote 24-hour French news and *Musique Plus*
- Use Conseil Culturel as the model to organize a French artist-in-the-schools program.
- Use *Youth Connect*, a directory of youth activities published annually (should be in all high schools).

## Discussion

Jeux de l’Acadie (for 12- to 15-year-olds) is a good model for how to organize games. The model could be expanded for younger and older students, with competition progressing from local to regional to national. It could be expanded to include FSL students as well as francophones, and could include drama, dance, singing, visual arts, music, and writing. Francophone artists, musicians, actors, and the like, would be made available to all schools.

The Atlantic Provinces Education Foundation has developed a Cultural Awareness Kit, which has recently been made available to Nova Scotia schools. It includes five CDs of music, visual arts, pop culture, literature, film, and video that feature Atlantic Canadians. The package is for French first-language students in Grades 7 and 8, and is being used in social studies and other classes. Each of the five sections has 12 information sheets. The package is found on the Authorized Learning Resources list. There is a need to let others know when new resources like this are available, perhaps via a News spot on the Web site.

Participants said that French and English—the two solitudes—should be brought together via the arts and sports. One aid would be a database containing ideas for radio programs, TV programs, theatrical productions, debating teams, and sports events (“équipe des Francophiles”).

## **Conclusions/Closing**

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Brennick thanked participants for their excellent input and noted that the national event will take place in the third week of April. At that time, the results from all of the stakeholder consultations across the country will be presented. He added that he would love to hear from anyone who has further input on how to provide opportunities for young people to learn French. “I appreciated the diversity today,” Brennick said, referring to the fact that one group carried out all of their discussions in French, and to the cooperative spirit between francophones and anglophones.

He thanked the recorders, saying their report will provide Nova Scotia’s input nationally. In closing, he said, “We can stand up proudly as Nova Scotians because we have done our part.”

The meeting was adjourned.