

Canadian Parents for French

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

Quebec Consultation

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Education	1
Question 1: Students and learning	1
Question 2: Teachers and instruction.....	4
Question 3: Public opinion and community context.....	6
Question 4: Institutional support and accessibility	7
Business	8
Question 5	8
Arts, Culture, and Sports.....	9
Question 6	9
Conclusions/Closing	10

Introduction

James Shea, National Executive Director of Canadian Parents for French (CPF), welcomed close to 20 participants to the Quebec French Second-Language Stakeholder Consultation. A national organization of about 20,000 volunteers, including more than 300 members in Quebec, the CPF is in the process of establishing its Quebec branch office.

One of the main objectives of the federal government's new plan on linguistic duality is to double the number of bilingual young Canadians by 2013. A national symposium held in Toronto in early March brought together stakeholders from across Canada, who identified a number of challenges to implementing the plan. Retention is a major issue and research shows a drop-off in opportunities to continue to learn and use French. Public opinion represents another challenge, with persistent prejudices against the promotion of learning in two languages. However, Shea noted the significant number of francophone communities outside Quebec, with approximately 150,000 children enrolled in French first-language schools across Canada. In addition, more than 300,000 young Canadians are enrolled in French immersion programs across Canada.

Facilitator Paul Castonguay explained that the objectives of the consultation were two-fold: to determine which recommendations emerging from the national symposium would be most effective, and to identify considerations particular to Quebec.

A round of introductions showed the range of stakeholders at the meeting, including a student trained in both the French and English education systems, French-language teachers, school board and CEGEP administrators, ESL and FSL education advocates, Quebec CPF chapter volunteers, and representatives from the Department of Canadian Heritage and the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, leaders in this initiative.

At the outset, participants noted that the promotion of second language education has different nuances in Quebec, since in this province French is the first language of the majority. There are two challenges: the promotion of learning English among francophones as well as French among anglophones. However, ESL and FSL share common issues (e.g., the training of qualified teachers), and collaboration would be of benefit to both objectives.

Education

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

- Encourage children to participate in extra-curricular activities in a second language.
- Publicize exchange opportunities.
- Promote second-language learning in day care centres.

Discussion

Participants were tasked with highlighting the best recommendations from the national symposium.

One participant advocated focusing on the recommendation for an infusion of enthusiasm and freshness as a good starting point, from which the other recommendations would flow.

Student exchanges provide an appreciation of both language and culture, hence are a key part of second language education, a participant stated. As well, cultural exchanges are an important marketing tool for bilingual education.

Noting that there are particular needs and peculiarities in Quebec, a participant proposed highlighting aspects of the recommendations where the province diverges from pan-Canadian interests. “Quebec parents want their children to have two first languages—there are no second languages here,” he added. Other participants agreed and said marketing bilingual education is unnecessary in Quebec. Still, French as a second language is in demand, with many anglophone parents in the greater Montréal area pushing for improvement to the teaching of FSL and immersion programs. This misperception needs to be changed, another asserted. “Researchers show that there is in fact an interdependence in languages, and those who learn second languages actually see benefits to their first language.” It is vital to promote a better understanding among parents and administrators so that changes can be made within the school systems in early stages.

One barrier to improving bilingualism is that some parents are concerned that learning a second language may have a negative impact on first language learning, a participant observed. She added that efforts to increase French language immersion can be sensitive, with concern about how it will impact English language education. Another challenge noted is that in urban centres, French represents learning a third language for minority groups.

A participant expressed great concern over what he described as a relatively recent policy interpretation by the Quebec government that overlooks Charter rights (Section 23) to people who studied French immersion. He cited two cases where students in French immersion programs in other provinces were not allowed to enter immersion programs in Quebec. Continuing this policy would have a deterrent effect for the very people at the forefront of making bilingual education a reality now, let alone deterring new students.

Student retention is critical and must begin earlier. It is important to look at the types of programs being offered and work on attracting more students, as well as finding qualified ESL and FSL instructors to motivate them. Speaking from personal experience, a participant stated that the best time to learn a second language is definitely as a child, when the language “wires itself in brain and you don’t lose it.” It is important to study in the opposite language than you come home to, she said.

Working with constrained resources, schools must choose between investing in immersion programs or putting resources towards enrichment and services to meet other educational needs.

A participant stressed that language education is not the sole responsibility of the school or teacher. Parents have a key role to play. “Unless you are using the language in a meaningful context outside the classroom, you will always remain at the *niveau débutant*,” he added, noting that children who have extra-curricular interactions with children from the other language group excel in their second language.

A participant suggested that given different interpretations of bilingualism, this meeting consider bilingualism to refer to “confident fluency” in one’s second language. This led to the observation that second language reinforcement outside schools is easier in urban areas such as Montréal.

A participant cautioned that encouraging Quebec anglophone parents to send their children to French schools could leave a dearth of students in the English system, since Bill 101 prohibits their French counterparts from sending their children to school in English. Care needs to be taken in how this is promoted.

A participant reiterated that a key concern among parents putting their children in French immersion programs is that they not lose the right to education in their first language, and that there has been an “insidious” erosion of distinction between first and second language instruction. At the same time, French parents in Quebec are demanding the right to English immersion programs, as a matter of fairness.

Language and education is very political, a participant commented. He told participants about the Fullum Street program for elementary school children that helps bridge the cultures through weekend bilingual exchanges arranged between the French and English school boards. However, the program is little known and the Ministry of Education is working to make information about this and many other exchange programs more accessible.

A participant emphasized the importance of supporting existing programs. He referred to the federal Monitor Program, which hires university students to work with teachers as second language teachers monitors; however, the program is seeing a decreasing volume in applications and more marketing, endorsement, and support is needed. Another program, French for the Future, involves matching senior high schools with professionals, who discuss how French has been a benefit to their careers. Exchange opportunities should be well-publicized—people should not have to go searching for it, a participant stated.

It was noted that CPF branch offices play an important role in communicating information on bilingual exchange programs and events to families, for instance, through their Web sites. The role of CPF National Office is to coordinate the network, facilitate partnerships among various groups, and help market programs.

It is important to look at second language learning in daycares. Daycares provide early opportunities for teaching children as well as changing parental attitudes. Qualification of daycare staffing needs to be improved so that the focus is on teaching rather than babysitting, a participant said.

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

- Expand McGill University's training program for FSL teachers to include l'Université de Quebec and Université de Montréal.
- Encourage universities to adopt similar standards for accepting teaching candidates.
- Open and expand the quotas for teacher training programs.
- Examine the working conditions of teachers in an effort to address problems identified.
- Use CMEC to promote these issues.
- Provide adequate funding to school boards so they can promote professional development for teachers and provide better classroom support.

Discussion

With current teacher shortages, young Canadians need to be attracted to the teaching profession and persuaded about thinking of teaching as a career. High school, CEGEP, first- and second-year university students are good targets, as they are making career choices.

A participant stated, "We are not training our teacher for the realities of the modern classroom. Teacher training institutes have to do a better job in all areas." Another challenge is attracting quality people to teaching profession. Even those who are drawn into teaching are "leaving in droves," with losses of about 50 per cent in the first five years of teaching. In addition, FSL instructors in the Quebec and Ottawa area are competent for immersion teaching, but in other areas, teachers often lack adequate training. Teaching exchanges among the provinces are effective, a participant suggested.

McGill University has traditionally been the training ground for FSL teachers, however, a participant said that there should be serious effort to promote FSL courses geared to the teaching profession with l'Université de Quebec and Université de Montréal.

Scholarships for teacher training would help, and assurance of a fast track to a job would also make the field more attractive. A strong recommendation is needed to universities to examine how they can assist in training more and better second language teachers. Admissions quotas in teaching training programs do not jive with the shortages of teachers in ESL and FSL across Canada, said a participant.

A participant reiterated the importance of retaining teachers. At the same time, she noted that second language teachers often enter their careers enthusiastic, but demands such as serving five different schools at once and other organizational aspects take their toll. The correlation between working conditions and retention needs to be established.

Recruitment of FSL teachers will be an ongoing challenge in the rest of Canada, given positions opening up within Quebec due to retirement, a participant said. Another noted that a CPF study last year on FSL teacher supply showed that there are not nearly enough teachers to cover existing needs for FSL instruction, let alone meeting the goal of doubling bilingual graduates by 2013. The issue of teacher supply is a major problem.

A participant suggested that retired teachers who “still have the flame” or representatives from the Ministry of Education could speak at schools to provide encouraging testimonials. Another participant added that mentoring programs should be encouraged whereby experienced teachers help new ones toward independence in the profession. One advocated that school boards be obligated to have a system of mentoring. Mentoring should be institutional and be part of the last years of school. Another participant indicated that the English school boards are not against the idea of mentoring but that funding was an issue.

Currently, teacher training is moving away from one-year programs to Bachelor of Education or two-year programs. If, however, school boards certified teachers, the shortage could be addressed and a community-based pedagogical approach could be simultaneously developed. This was done in Ontario in the 1960s during a time of teacher shortage.

A participant observed that action on this issue could be addressed on a number of fronts:

- Politicians could use a vehicle such as the CMEC to promote these issues.
- Universities could adopt similar standards for accepting teaching candidates.
- School boards need to better support teachers (e.g. funding for French language consultants).
- Teachers should be funded to pursue professional education.

He also noted the vast resource the Internet offers to FSL teachers but cautioned, “It all comes back to the need for funding to free teachers to pursue their education.”

The facilitator noted that the discussion yielded a good environmental scan of issues within the classroom, approaches to competency, and fluency in core French and immersion programs, as well as particular linguistic concerns in Quebec. Universities must do their part to prepare teachers in order to meet today’s needs in the classroom.

Before leaving the question, a participant noted that a common effort was needed to raise awareness and that her association senses the same issues yet feels isolated. It was agreed that unity was essential as was parent support. This idea was reiterated by another participant who suggested that lobbying would have greater impact if the teacher shortage becomes an issue for all teachers, not only FSL teachers. A joint common issue would benefit FSL programs indirectly.

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

- Elevate French-language education to the same status as English or math.
- Provide adequate support for classroom resources.

Discussion

Before discussing the third question, the term “community” was clarified. James Shea said that the word “community” extends beyond the educational one to involve providing support and appreciation for French because “the broader community isn’t seeing the issues.” A participant noted that recent government programming allows many decisions to be made at the school level, which could allow for community influence. Another stakeholder related that school level decisions are also affecting ESL programs and stressed the importance of working with the community and parents with the support of teachers. “No one group can do it alone, neither the parents, the teachers, or the school boards,” said a participant, suggesting that CPF could provide leadership on this issue.

The first step is to go back to the vision of having a significant number of bilingual graduates, said another participant, noting that this is not a vision held by many provincial governments outside Quebec. “They have to buy into it and give French a higher status.” French must be given the same importance as math; if math is necessary to graduate, French should be as well. Another participant noted that this is already the case with ESL students who must succeed in English as well as math in order to obtain a diploma.

A participant commented on the sense of complacency about the FSL issue in the greater Montréal area where five English school boards offer a wide range of French language opportunities. “Here, parents are able to choose and the school will deliver. Will this result in bilingual kids?” He then noted that outside Montréal there are four English school boards for the rest of Quebec. Will they be able to achieve the same goal? Another participant pointed out that putting the onus on school boards to produce bilingual students would be unfair and added that he was uncomfortable with the notion of two first languages.

A participant noted the difficulty in choosing between programs when money is not specifically earmarked. Discussion ensued about the degree of support to provincial second language programs by the federal government. A government spokesperson noted that both minority and second language programs are funded; however, this funding also depends on provincial government submissions.

FSL program money is dedicated for teacher professional development and not for the classroom. The same was observed for ESL program funding. There is, however, specific second language funding from the CMEC that supports classroom integration of out-of-province students. In contrast, he said, “When the Ministry of Education of Quebec allots money for education, it doesn’t differentiate between math and French,” said a participant. Allocation remains the prerogative of the school boards whose decision is influenced by the community.

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

- Apply some of Quebec’s policies that highlight the value of second languages in school curricula across the country.
- Promote success stories such as the new, intensive FSL program in isolated communities.

Discussion

One participant said that he would like to see some of Quebec’s policies that highlight the value of second languages in school curricula applied across Canada. “In Quebec there is a competency-based curriculum with testing by outside (of school) staff, something that is missing across the rest of Canada.” Furthermore, outside of Quebec, Grade 12 French cannot be defined in terms of functionality. This suggests that FSL is not considered important enough in other provinces. Agreeing, another participant noted that “it is a very different proposition here than when you cross the border.” The highest high school enrolment in French is in the Maritimes, and enrolment decreases as one moves west across Canada. “If you are English-speaking then your other language should be French,” she emphasized.

Acknowledging that selling FSL in Quebec is different than selling it elsewhere in the country, a participant stressed that the FSL situation is not the same across Quebec. “There is no French immersion in isolated, anglophone communities of Quebec’s North Coast near Labrador.” Another participant agreed that these communities represented extreme cases but also emphasized the virtues of the Quebec system. “If it was available outside of Quebec, it would be

considered progress, “ he said, pointing out Quebec’s requirement for a third language. He stressed the importance of unity rather than pinpointing unique cases.

Addressing FSL programs and progress outside of Quebec, one stakeholder noted that some provinces and universities are considering implementing FSL requirements. This will have a trickle-down effect to schools. Furthermore, all teacher education candidates in Newfoundland and Labrador now have to complete French courses in high school.

She explained the implementation of a new, very successful intensive French program in these regions since French immersion was not possible in most of the isolated communities. Starting at the Grade 6 level, the intensive French program provides intensive, theme-based French immersion for five months, employing the language arts approach. The results have been very positive with participating students being able to communicate spontaneously in French and to write French compositions at the Grade 3 level. “It is changing our ways to doing things,” she said. Another participant concurred, noting that a similar, effective model was being applied in the ESL context that responds to the needs of the community. ESL students come out of the program very functional in English and “keep their edge” into CEGEP.

Business

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

- Use career days and job showing to show the necessity of FSL education.
- Use testimonials from business leaders to encourage students to learn French by citing enhanced opportunities for international work, travel, and chances for promotion.

Discussion

“Clearly, if you want to be in communications, French is key,” acknowledged a participant. While this seems evident, it is another matter to disseminate this information, said another. Anglophone children live in a francophone majority community and therefore they must understand the importance of FSL. Yet, it is difficult to relate the relevance of French for a future career to a 10-year old. Another participant agreed, commenting that children are more interested in “the fun factor.” Learning French must be seen as more play than work.

A participant related the importance of career days and job shadowing in francophone environments, something students have been asking for. The mandate of the English CEGEP curriculum is to provide students with the ability to work in Quebec. “They need to be bilingual in order to get through the program,” said another participant.

One participant suggested that the group consider the four points made in the discussion paper (on page 10) as significant answers. Others agreed that awards could provide incentives and that the celebration of bilingualism is important. Bilingual anglophone business role models could also help demystify French. Testimonials from business leaders could encourage students to learn French by citing enhanced opportunities for international work, travel, and chances for promotion.

“How many graduates of successful French immersion programs work in Quebec branches of anglophone companies?” asked a participant. Are there job opportunities for French immersion graduates in Quebec’s private sector? Would this be a source of encouragement to students? Some anecdotal evidence was offered suggesting that this may indeed be the case. In contrast, many anglophone immersion graduates leave jobs in the Outaouais because they feel their French is not good enough.

Arts, Culture, and Sports

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

- Use TV and radio campaigns that feature sports and arts stars to promote French.
- Promote the Quebec model of compulsory arts education in curricula.

Discussion

There was consensus on the importance of the arts and sports in promoting bilingualism. One participant noted that the arts are compulsory components in the Quebec curriculum. The *Artistes et écrivains dans l'école* program, which invites painters, story tellers and others into the classroom, only costs the school \$100 but has not been fully exploited. Another example is a successful contest for students in Grade 4, comprised of written and oral components.

TV and radio campaigns that feature artists and sport stars are needed to promote French, remarked another participant noting that only 54% of anglophone parents want French for their children. “We are now in sales,” he said. “We have to change attitudes; once people organize the rest will follow.”

A participant noted that arts, culture, and sports are a means of engagement. “French is not just a subject,” he said. “Sometimes we are victims of simultaneous translation and as such we should look for opportunities for engagement in other languages.” A participant observed that students want engagement—rather than games in French, they would prefer research papers. Echoing this idea of engagement, another participant noted the value of film, suggesting that vignettes should be made by and for young people. “The best way for students to learn is do to the things they love,” said a former participant of Les Jeux du Quebec, reflecting on the whole culture experience. “Les Jeux were not just about language but about history, culture, etc.” The term “culture” needs to be expanded. Contact with people who live differently could create a better acceptance and knowledge of other communities.

Conclusions/Closing

The consultation group brought some final thoughts forward:

- Help students organize themselves as instruments of coalition and pressure.
- Use demographics (for example, there is a high support for bilingualism among young women) as a means to promote the issue.

James Shea acknowledged the support of the directors of the English school boards as well as the anglophone services of the Ministry of Education of Quebec. He noted that although bilingualism is not “on the radar screen of some groups,” CPF has very much “raised the bar” on the issue. “French immersion is our best export—our concept is used around the world,” he said. He also reflected on the importance of the CPF chapter here in Quebec, the successful CPF intensive summer camps, and other events that celebrate bilingualism such the National Concours. He suggested challenging funders and membership to promote more dialogue with young people. In conclusion he noted that the report of the consultations should reflect the differences within Quebec and other areas of the country to obtain truly national input.