

Canadian Parents for French

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

Saskatchewan Consultation

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Introduction

Canadian Parents for French Saskatchewan (CPF-SK) executive director, Karen Taylor Browne, outlined the history leading up to this conference. She thanked the Honourable Pierre Pettigrew, Minister of Health, Minister for Intergovernmental Relations and Minister responsible for Official Languages, for initiating this series of national stakeholders' meetings to discuss the Action Plan for Official Languages that was tabled in March 2003 by his predecessor, the Honourable Stéphane Dion. The process, of which the stakeholders' meetings is a part, began with a meeting in November 2003 hosted by the Commissioner of Official Languages in which presentations were made by several prominent researchers. Their ideas provided input for the National Symposium, *Visions and Challenges for the 21st Century*, held in Toronto in early March 2004. The questions that provided a focus for that Symposium, together with some of the challenges and strategies identified by its participants will guide the discussion today.

The Action Plan for Official Languages sets two broad objectives for education that relate to francophone minority communities and French second-language instruction. The objectives are to increase the number of eligible students enrolled in francophone minority schools, and to double, within 10 years, the proportion of secondary school graduates with a functional knowledge of French.

Since the Action Plan's goal was generated using 2001 Census statistics, the 10-year deadline actually becomes 2011. The target population is 15 to 19 year olds. The criterion used to determine "bilingualism" is a census respondent's answer to the question, "Can this person speak English and French well enough to conduct a conversation?" Integrating these figures into the Action Plan would mean, at the national level, increasing bilingualism to 50% from 24%, and at the provincial level, working toward 18.4% from 9.2%. Saskatchewan's bilingual youth population, as indicated by the statistics, is believed by CPF to be made up primarily of French immersion students, francophone students and core French students who have either completed Grade 12 or who have participated in a summer bursary program or extended exchange.

A logistical problem exists for Saskatchewan in reaching this goal. The students who make up the youngest age group in the target population for the 2011 Census are Grade 4 students this year. With only 787 francophone and immersion students in Grade 4 across the province, and the size of the four older immersion and francophone program groups being even smaller, the goal of having 13,800 students graduate with a functional knowledge of French seems challenging.

Currently, 65% of students in Saskatchewan who start in immersion or francophone minority programs in kindergarten do not continue through to Grade 12. This rate of retention is cause for concern. As well, the statistics show diminished numbers of bilingual individuals since the 1996 Census in the comparable age groups. This indicates one of several possibilities: the Census bilingualism measure is inadequate, French skills diminish over the five years because young people do not have access to post-secondary education or jobs in French, or some of the students left the province after graduation.

On an international level, Canadians are trailing in the statistics. Only 62% of non-francophone Canadians aged 18 to 34 feel it would be important for their children to learn French compared to 55–75% of Americans who, depending on where they live, would support having their children learn Spanish. Furthermore, only 28% of Canadians know a second language. In this respect, we fall far behind Europeans, with a bilingual population of 53%.

Facilitator Donna Bruce reiterated that the topics of discussion would be the questions from the National Symposium and the purpose is to provide the Saskatchewan perspective on the issues. She asked participants to reflect on what is working now and what could work for the future, to achieve the Action Plan 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

- Promote both curricular and extra-curricular French programs, from preschool to post-secondary education.
- Recruit new students.
- Fund school-run French preschool programs.
- Initiate more intensive core French programs.
- Hold more cultural exchanges, which enhance students' learning and passion for the language.
- Ensure that programs are especially dynamic at the levels of transition between programs—for example from elementary to high school or preschool to kindergarten.
- Establish support groups for parents where they do not exist and strengthen the ones that do exist.
- Ensure there is good communication and support from teachers and schools to the parents of children in FSL classes.
- Hire experienced, vibrant teachers.
- Encourage teachers to speak only French in the classroom and encourage the same of students.
- Provide opportunities for students to spend time with successful, bilingual community members in interesting careers, through a mentoring program.
- Make a second-language credit a requirement to graduate from a post-secondary institution.

- Explore the possibilities offered by online education.
- Grant “bilingual” status by a testing program rather than the level of education or the number of credits for subjects studied in French.
- Establish late French immersion programs or some other mechanism for allowing students to enter immersion at a point other than kindergarten or Grade 1.
- Direct attention to aboriginal students’ needs, including the prospect of more trilingual programs such as the one currently operating in LaRonge.

Discussion

The facilitator asked the group to provide the Saskatchewan perspective. What are the significant factors and realities in this province that must be considered in discussing this topic?

A number of factors were found to be unique or particularly relevant to the experiences of Saskatchewan students. For example, retention of students is a very important issue for Saskatchewan French programs. Students are leaving immersion programs before high school because of the pressure to get adequate grades for university admission. There is an attitude that higher grades are attainable in the English program. This added challenge acts as a deterrent. There is a misconception in Saskatchewan that students achieving high academic standings must stray from French studies and pursue science. Another misconception is that a student’s skills in English will suffer if the student does not take his or her high school courses in English. In addition, it is very difficult for French students in high school to get decent scheduling of classes, which is discouraging.

A number of concerns about the French program were captured in the research study by Margaret Noel, 2003, *To Stay or Not to Stay? Factors Influencing Parents of Early French Immersion Students Experiencing Learning Difficulties*, www.unb.ca/slec/. The study outlines the major anxieties about the quality of French education, the fear of “losing out,” and the unknown outcomes of education.

The geography of Saskatchewan is a reality that must be acknowledged. It is an enormous distance from any dominant French-speaking area. Within the province, francophone communities are small and broadly dispersed. Furthermore, the distance between cities and towns creates challenges for rural students getting access to any French program. There are extra costs associated with these distance and accessibility issues.

There are also a great number of competing ethno-linguistic groups in the province.

At a post-secondary level, there are few options for students in Saskatchewan to continue their French education. There is a myth that those students who are not satisfied with the post-secondary French program will go elsewhere; however, often the student will just revert to the English programs. There are not as many French program options for future training, especially in trade programs. Many French students feel they must choose between a Bachelor of Arts in French or a Bachelor of French Education program. The lack of post-secondary support of the

French language can be illustrated by the fact that even advanced French education programs are being taught in English. Why is even the instruction of French teachers done in English?

The skill of bilingualism is not seen as relevant in the Saskatchewan culture.

Discussing possible solutions, participants noted that the benefits of bilingualism—success stories—need promotion. Recruitment must begin at a very young age through preschools and day care centres. It is important to support parents while they are deciding which program to put their children in. The misconception that anglophone parents are not allowed to enrol their children needs to be corrected. Resources need to be made available for parents considering choosing the immersion program. Support that can help reinforce French skills should also be in place for students in anglophone families, during the year and over the summer, and these programs need to be affordable and accessible.

Part of this involves good communication and support from teachers and schools to the parents of children in FSL classes. When communication is lost, students are tempted to leave the program.

It is important to adequately fund FSL education, said participants. Even current pilot projects lack sufficient funding.

Once students are in an FSL program, it is important to pay attention to the “transition years” when students switch from one school to another. Attrition is the greatest at these points, which therefore need to be the first target for program improvements.

Exchange programs provide a wonderful opportunity for students to experience French outside the classroom. These exchanges could involve francophone communities that are more accessible, rather than solely France and Quebec. It is important to seed, nurture, and cultivate a passion for language, and especially for acquiring a second language. Belief in the necessity of the French language and a positive attitude toward French culture needs to be expressed by schools and communities.

Participants noted that in order to graduate from Memorial University, students have a second language credit. In some areas, this could be an excellent solution to the problem of accessibility to instructors or programs.

Since teachers can “make or break” a student’s experience, their role is vital in recruitment and retention. It is important that teachers have opportunities to rejuvenate their passion for the language and culture, as well as refresh their skills.

Participants also said that students need every opportunity available to speak French. Teachers and students alike should be encouraged to speak only French in the classroom. If students are not comfortable using their skills in the classroom, they will never feel confident or comfortable speaking the language.

Participants called for programs to be developed that would provide recognition for French students, allow them to display their French competency, and/or participate in work experience or exchanges where they can use their French. Currently French students must “market” themselves to businesses and schools.

Finally, participants called for attention to be directed to aboriginal students’ needs, including the prospect of more trilingual programs such as the one currently operating in LaRonge.

The last part of the discussion turned to personal, positive experiences of group members. One participant noted that some francophone schools have created a “recruiter” position, to focus solely on the recruitment of as many students as possible. Another said that cultural coordinators have also been effective. Their role is to provide French activities outside the classroom, over the lunch hour, or after school. These activities provide the students with an opportunity to be involved in sports, culture or leadership roles that incorporate use of the French language.

Giving elementary students the opportunity to spend some time with high school immersion students allows them to see the full extent of the program and what it has to offer.

One participant cited the intensive core French program, in its pilot stages with the Saskatoon Catholic School Board, as an example of a program that has shown tremendous results. The program functions at the Grade 6 level and provides participants with 65% French in the curriculum as a mechanism for concentrating the French program and accelerating the students’ learning.

Cultural exchanges have been proven to stimulate the interest of students in the French language. They are given the opportunity to experience the culture and see the relevance of the language in real 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

- Provide teachers with a list of contacts and useful resources (referral agencies, French organizations, etc.)
- Use a holistic teaching approach that integrates French language instruction into school activities and the whole school program.
- Incorporate defined outcomes into the provincial curriculum.
- Provide financial aid in the form of bursaries or funding for mentoring programs.
- Increase post-secondary opportunities to study French in Saskatchewan.

- Fund more resource positions.
- Provide ongoing professional development and in-service and release time for teachers (mentoring). The mini-immersion model seems to work well.
- Improve working conditions by providing a physical space (homeroom) and more preparation time.
- Allow French teachers to get an additional-qualification certificate, as teachers in other subjects can.
- Target local support from francophone and French-speaking people, in terms of training teachers.
- Hire early.
- Promote the importance of having living, vibrant francophone communities in the province.

Discussion

The facilitator asked participants to review the ideas proposed in the discussion paper and identify the strategies they believe are the most acceptable and have the strongest potential for achieving the stated 10-year objectives for education in Saskatchewan.

One participant said that some of the challenges identified in the discussion guide were less of a challenge in Saskatchewan, and did not feel there is an “unclear curriculum” and “limited materials.” She felt the current curriculum is strong, that materials do exist, and that better promotion of them may be what is needed.

Several people agreed that it is very important to tailor programming for rural areas, particularly since the retention of students in French is higher in the rural areas where programs are offered.

One of the challenges identified was late immersion. There is no program currently offered. Participants suggested promoting collaboration between all three programs—core, immersion, and Fransaskois. Communication and networking are key.

Several people also felt that there should be more opportunities for collaboration between francophone community members and educators and FSL educators through additional communication and teacher in-services.

One participant suggested that more French language professional-development opportunities for immersion and core French teachers be provided. Most professional development is school-wide and offered in English so French teachers need to adapt or develop this information. This creates greater demands on these teachers. The information provided through professional development opportunities can be applied to a French classroom, but is not specific to a French classroom. That needs to change.

Several participants stated that core French teachers often feel isolated, as there is usually only one teacher in each school. Most core French teachers do not have homerooms and instead push a cart around from room to room. French teachers need to feel valued as teachers, and the lack of physical space sends a message that the program is not as important as a homeroom-centred

classroom. Space should be allotted to French so that students respond better to their own teacher. The retention issue is related to lack of value.

There are strengths to the curriculum and good resources and materials available, but there is a deficiency of stated learning outcomes for different grades/levels. A lack of learning outcomes leaves little in the way of attained satisfaction for students and teachers. Defining learning outcomes more clearly, particularly at elementary levels, might create more opportunities for attaining satisfaction.

What learning outcomes do exist tend to relate more to grammar and less to speaking, culture, etc. There should be a focus on authentic communication versus grammar.

A participant suggested that core French begin at different grade levels than is currently occurring. In addition, classrooms could be mixed, with core students spending time with French immersion classes. The important thing is that it has to be fun and meaningful, and language development should be seen in the same way—it should be fun.

One participant stated that time given to instruction is very limited and that students are not challenged enough. He felt the goals are not lofty enough, and if students are challenged more, the outcomes will be greater.

Another challenge identified was not having enough instructors to teach French. In some smaller centres, teachers knowing a minimal amount of French may be called upon to teach because there is no other teacher qualified. Students pick up quickly on this and the perception is that a second language is not important. With a lack of applications for positions, it is important to recruit teachers in a way that inspires and gives them confidence regarding classroom instruction.

Mentoring was seen as a possible aid to teacher retention. One participant suggested broadcasting to school divisions that 50% funding for the implement of mentorship programs can be obtain through the new funding coming from the federal Action Plan.

Delivery is a problem with the push for sciences and applied arts making it necessary for students to graduate with a specified number of credits in these subjects. The “credit crunch” is decreasing the number of students choosing French since French is not classified among the required group of university entry courses. Making French a requirement for graduation would address this.

One participant stated that there is a shortage of teachers who have skills to do research and write papers, and therefore there are no tools or research to assist teachers at the local level.

Another participant said that the difficulty is in recruitment. Teachers are the key to retention, since they are role models. Yet another said that recruitment and training are the biggest issues, rather than retention. “We recruit, they leave.” One participant suggested “hiring early” by speaking to each language class at Saskatchewan universities. French teachers are being recruited for positions in Mexico. Recent graduates are job shopping. If we promote and recruit our students to teach French, they will stay in Saskatchewan.

Participants identified a lack of FSL resource people. Currently, the only ones available are in Regina at the University of Regina. Saskatoon (northern Saskatchewan) is weak in this area. A French program is no longer available at the University of Saskatchewan and fewer qualified people are going into French teaching.

Another suggestion was to allow French teachers to get an additional-qualification certificate, as teachers in other subjects can. Work must be done with the province to change this. Professional development opportunities are very important.

Participants described some best practices and additional strategies:

- In one rural school, the expectation was that all teachers participate, in Grades 1–4, in French teaching during part of the day (e.g., at circle time; using French to talk about the weather, time, days of the week).
- One school division initiated a core mentorship program and recruited five or six teacher-mentors through the Official Languages office. Each new core French teacher in rural areas was paired with a mentor.
- The community-schools model successfully utilizes people from the community.
- Distance education could provide a way to get more people interested in teaching French.

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

- Define, categorize, and promote bilingual businesses to the public.
- Provide government tax incentives to bilingual businesses and subsidize printed bilingual material.
- Ensure that businesses are involved in employment opportunities for bilingual youth.
- Make French services visible and audible.
- Establish language assessment tools to help businesses hire bilingual staff.

Discussion

The facilitator asked participants to reflect on the positive experiences and best practices they have encountered, and to recommend additional strategies.

The group first reflected on the uniqueness of Saskatchewan from a business perspective. A discussion ensued about the realities of the Saskatchewan business community's role in

supporting the action plan. There are not a lot of bilingual businesses in Saskatchewan. Perhaps more bilingual businesses exist than are known, but Saskatchewan has no way of defining or recognizing these businesses as bilingual. In addition, there is no desperate internal need for bilingual business because such a small percentage of the population is bilingual. This acts as a deterrent for businesses to make themselves bilingual.

Saskatchewan lacks experience in being a multilingual society. Many of the citizens have never even experienced living in or visiting a bilingual society. With a lack of knowledge and experience comes some fear and reluctance. There is also a political reality that needs to be recognized, said a participant: the East versus West attitude affects the society and its paradigms. *Ideas need to come from within the province.*

Language in general, including the French language, is viewed in Saskatchewan through an historical or cultural perspective. French is seen as part of Canada's history and the francophone culture, but it is not embraced as part of the province's present nor seen as relevant in everyday life. There is also a history in Saskatchewan of not valuing language. In the province's past, there was a time when teaching a language other than English was illegal. This history affects people's attitudes.

There are competing needs for and interests in learning French. The motivation for some is to learn the official language of Canada—it is part of our heritage. For others there is economic motivation. Any increase in the numbers of bilingual students is important.

Saskatchewan tends to ignore globalism, said a participant. There is a need to acknowledge potential business partners who do not speak English.

The next part of the discussion focused more on possible actions or commitments that can be made by the business community or by the government to aid the business community's initiatives. These initiatives are to promote bilingualism in general as well as to help in reaching the goals outlined in the Action Plan.

It is necessary to create a definition of a bilingual business and to categorize businesses as bilingual or not. Once designated bilingual, businesses should be promoted and recognized as being capable of providing quality bilingual service. Efforts should be made to promote to the public and businesses that bilingualism is an asset to business. Awareness of the vast business partnerships that can be made, and the relevance of the use of the French language in dealing with global partnerships should be promoted. Learning French also opens doors to the learning of other languages, which can be a vital asset.

The existing French business community needs to make itself visible to the public. One suggested initiative would provide businesses with a bilingual business sticker much like those provided to non-smoking businesses. However, while the business community can provide assistance and support, it is ineffective without partnerships with other stakeholders. The business community must work hand in hand with the educational community to provide effective initiatives. Business can support second language learning, but it cannot be the driving force.

The government can provide tax incentives for bilingual businesses in order to motivate businesses to make the transition. It should provide assistance to businesses capable of offer verbal service in French by subsidizing the preparation of printed materials in both languages. There needs to be promotion and awareness of bilingual business status, the benefits to the community, and the rewards for the business. Will bilingual businesses make more money? That cannot be determined definitively, but it is certain they will not lose money.

By promoting the conversion of businesses to bilingual status, a demand for bilingual employees will follow. This creates attractive job opportunities for bilingual students and motivation for others to become bilingual. Bilingual youth need full time and summer employment opportunities in French here in the province, so that they stay in the province. Businesses could play an active role in providing opportunities for students and adults to use French. This could be done by sponsoring exchanges or providing employment or work placement opportunities.

Businesses should take an active role in choosing bilingual employees and in providing opportunities for other employees to learn French. In the same way that businesses supplement additional training for employees, businesses could supplement learning another language. French services must be visible, available and actively offered. They are not effective if the service is awkward or hidden.

The CBC could more actively participate, especially by promoting and supporting the French language, on English TV.

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

- Develop national and provincial campaigns to enhance FSL instruction.
- Educate senior administrators across the province.
- Tap into the provincial program the government has developed to keep young people in the province.
- Offer people the opportunity to learn French outside of school.
- Link into the community, for example through a French pavilion at Folkfest/Mosiac.
- Convey to students that they can speak in both languages and encourage a change in cultural mindset. Have activities outside of the school, such as a basketball camp or music camp, which could happen in French.
- Organize a province-wide fair to get attention, or a rave in an arena.

- Find a few companies to promote an event (for example, a job fair) and move the message outside of the French community.

Discussion

Several members of the group supported the statement that Saskatchewan is unique, and that any approach must address this uniqueness and Saskatchewan's political culture. Nevertheless, the time is right to form a coalition between Saskatchewan Learning, the school divisions, Canadian Parents for French, and other organizations to market French language programs.

A consensus was reached that, though a national campaign is necessary, a local campaign is equally important to create awareness at the grassroots level. This would also aid in bringing together all the interested parties and creating partnerships.

The national campaign would provide a national and global context to answer the question, Why learn a second language? Statistics would be used, for example, to show the number of organizations functioning in French, nationally. The provincial campaign would bring the issue home with local stories and local messages.

National campaign

The group suggested that the national campaign be targeted to the general public, with the following key messages:

- Canadians value the official languages and should promote them.
- We value a second language and see its merit and usefulness (for example in job opportunities) nationally, and globally.
- We should focus on the positive aspects of studying any second language.

Provincial campaign

A participant stated that this is not just an education issue—it is also about second languages in general. The question is not one of capacity, but of the usefulness of a second language. Pressure should be put on post-secondary institutions, especially at the university level, to reinstate the requirement for a second language upon graduation. Not having this requirement has had a great effect on recruitment and may be driving people away from the province. The idea that success includes completing a second-language requirement at university sets the bar higher.

Alberta just introduced a second language requirement in high schools. Americans are increasingly learning a second language.

The group suggested that the provincial campaign be targeted to students, parents, and the general public with the following key messages:

- French language is relevant in Saskatchewan.

- Brain research has shown that learning a second language increases capacity. French immersion students read at a better level.
- Saskatchewan companies exist in French communities and therefore add value to the economy. Businesses with offices in Paris, Montreal, etc., need bilingual staff.
- Achievements should be recognized, with testimonials or personal experience stories from French speaking people. Provide good-news stories about individuals—not issues—to principals and teachers, and distribute them to media.
- “Our Saskatchewan students are out there.”
- “Study and learn and stay in the province.”

Partnerships

There is a need to promote our successes by telling parents that second language can lead to opportunities. Using other good news stories (outside of the second language issue) could strengthen the message.

From a business point of view, introduce incentives to business to hire a bilingual person. (Customers need to ask for it too.) A sticker on the door of businesses offering bilingual services makes French visible and is a plus for the business.

Get organizations together and sit down with the media. The media will not cover bilingual or second-language stories, and the English media are rarely there along with the French. Media outlets need to be educated about these success stories.

Several participants noted that there must be sensitivity in how successes are advertised. At the school division level, there is often competition between divisions. The view is that if one school division is successful, other divisions may look bad. Access to school trustees will be important.

One suggestion was to promote program successes by keeping the message in front of stakeholders and leaders by, for example, providing tickets to band concerts. Another was to ensure that employers at the division office know the importance of your program. Visit and explain the program. As well, it is important to educate senior administrators across the province.

Continue with meetings such as this one, which are a good step to team building. Collaboration among the Assemblée communautaire francosaskoïse, public and separate school boards, the League of Educational Administrators, Directors and Superintendents (LEADS) and the Saskatchewan School Boards' Association will bring a core group together for planning purposes. This will also create a way for more communication among all levels of government and French organizations. Although parents and educators will be the leaders for the campaign, leadership must also come from the government. It will be important to bring business people in on the team. Once they say we need kids with a second language in our business or overseas offices, a second language becomes more important.

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

- Change the funding allocation for Saskatchewan from a per-pupil basis to a funding formula that reflects the province's geography and distance between communities.
- Explore increased opportunities for distance education.
- Strengthen institutional support for programs that allow French teachers the opportunity to improve their skills.
- Mandate FSL education.

Discussion

Participants answered many of the questions pertaining to business in Question 3 under the discussion on community context. The discussion for this question began by looking at program issues and policy changes particularly relevant to Saskatchewan. The following ideas emerged:

- When looking at policy and program changes it is very important not to become preoccupied with funding. Funding is a finite resource and when it is added to one program, it is often taken away from another. Time would be better spent looking at creative solutions for the problems that exist.
- Saskatchewan is a big province with a small population. Its demographics are unique and need to be appreciated when looking at change and improvement to French programs. These geographic and demographic distinctions create particular challenges in areas such as transportation.
- The School Plus initiative in Saskatchewan gives schools and communities the power to make some decisions on the curriculum content they provide. When discussing changes to programming and policy, decision makers must remember that school divisions have the freedom to make some decisions about what programs need emphasis. Schools can even choose to decrease the emphasis on French.
- Is our goal to achieve functional bilingualism or complete bilingualism? Who is to decide this? Is it a provincial or federal choice?

Participants called for more accountability from federal and provincial governments concerning where grants from each government are to be spent, and less confusion about which sector should be funding which aspect of education. Currently, most funding decisions are made on a per-pupil basis. Considering Saskatchewan's sparse and dispersed population, this manner of

addressing funding issues may not be the most efficient way to get quality services to all students. There must be special consideration given to programs that do not have many students but are nonetheless necessary.

Distance education is a viable solution to many accessibility issues. Although there has been some anxiety about how realistic it is to expect students to learn a language without an instructor present, those who have experience with the program believe it is valuable. This resource often means the difference between offering a program or not, and helps eliminate shuttling students all over the province.

Staff development activities are very important. There must be strengthened institutional support for programs that allow French teachers the opportunity to improve their skills, both during the school year and in the summer. The pedagogical advantages of strong staff development are enormous. This could be an area for the federal government to supply support. Another initiative to strengthen staff development might be to encourage all teachers to become somewhat proficient in French, which would expose students at all times and not just in the French classroom.

A clearer definition of bilingualism and functional bilingualism is required. This definition must then be integrated with the learning objectives and expectations for each of the French programs. There is some resistance to standardized testing, but an evaluation mechanism to measure competency must be in place for all three streams. A more effective mechanism may be evaluating by using the levels of learning objectives met.

There is no way to meet the goal of doubling the number of students leaving high school with a competency in French without including core students and making French mandatory. Therefore, the core program needs to be tailored to produce students who have a functional knowledge of French. The core program may be enhanced with methods such as the intensive core program, which is in its pilot stages right now.

Program structure needs to be refined in order to outline the proportion of time that should be dedicated to French in all programs. Other programming initiatives such as the intensive core program, late entry immersion opportunities, and differentiated entry immersion programs should be given more support. All of these programs would increase the number of competent French students; however, more teachers and resources are needed for this. At the high school level, more importance should be placed on French core credits. A “credit crunch” situation already exists in which students are struggling to juggle all the courses they are required to take. French is an elective, and therefore its significance is diminished. One suggestion is to make French part of the practical and applied arts section. Implications from this adjustment would flow down into the elementary schools as well, to prepare students for the high school courses.

To meet the target number of students, French will have to be more than just an academic pursuit of conjugating verbs. The program is going to have to be about the culture, focusing on conversational French and not just grammar. Participants questioned if French could even be incorporated as a language arts credit. The course does look at the mechanics of language, and by

studying French, students often begin to appreciate the structure of the English language more. The French class does provide a language skill that can transfer over to other subjects.

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

- Develop a collaborative approach between French and English communities in arts, culture, and sport.
- Hire more French speaking arts and sports teachers.
- Create a provincial database of resources.
- Offer more visual arts and drama courses in French.

Discussion

The group began by investigating some of the existing challenges that limit the increase of high school graduates with a functional knowledge of French. In particular this group focused on challenges in the arts, culture and sport sectors. The following challenges were identified:

- Right now, a division exists between the French and English communities in arts, culture and sport. Without a collaborative approach from both communities, change will not be easy.
- Along with the awareness of francophone community activities, there must be a welcoming attitude towards participation in order to reduce fear and facilitate comfort for participants.
- When cuts are made, they generally affect arts, culture and sport sectors. Looking in these sectors for financial assistance for additional programs may not be effective. In any school there seems to be a lack of value placed on the arts.
- There is a lack of bilingual arts and sports teachers. These subjects are usually taught in English in immersion schools.

With each challenge identified the group tried to find feasible solutions that could be initiated by the arts, culture and sport sectors. These initiatives would increase the interest in the French culture and language.

The community must create connections. For example, francophone and immersion schools can collaborate on cultural events. This way the cost for a concert or tour can be shared between the

groups. It is important for teachers and community groups to know not only what is going on, but also to have the contact information necessary to initiate their own projects. A provincial database should be created that includes names, resources, a calendar of events, etc. Collaboration with the Saskatchewan Arts Council to supply information about the arts would be helpful. The council could add, include and connect with more bilingual artists. They might also be able to supply contact information on cultural events and performers.

Distance between communities is a reality in Saskatchewan. Video conferencing provides a means to share available resources. The use of technology is a simple way of accessing resources, and allowing students to use their French skills. A centralized Web site needs to be created that allows teachers, parents, and students to access a wide variety of French resources. A common calendar needs to be created that posts all French activities. This would provide easy promotion for activities and a way for community members to see all the French activities offered.

Schools and communities need to work together on French activities. Performances in the community could take place in the afternoon at schools, giving students access to a great cultural resource. Evening performances could then be offered to the whole community as a way of reducing costs and getting the most exposure for the resources spent.

Within the school system, an appreciation of the French culture can be achieved through offering more visual arts and drama classes in French at the elementary and secondary levels. It is important to engage high school students with highly skilled teachers and fun cultural activities, apart from purely academic exercises. A bilingual librarian in all schools would be a good resource to distribute both quality and quantity of French materials.

Summer camp is a valuable experience. It can spark children's interest in the French language and culture. Cultural exchanges and virtual exchanges give students a taste of French culture. Children need French friends, French activities, French resources and French travel opportunities.

A program currently exists that sends "gifts" to subscribing preschoolers of French books and other resources. This is a fun way of distributing educational materials in French to children at young ages. Some communities set up a material exchange that allows individuals within communities, and communities themselves, to exchange French resources.

There needs to be an attitude of acceptance between the francophone and anglophone communities. Francophones must be understanding and supportive of anglophones who are curious about the French language and culture. The same attitude needs to exist in the anglophone community towards the francophone community.

To strengthen the impact and awareness of French culture, French Immersion and Core French Week and la Semaine de la Francophonie should be coordinated.

Francophone communities and schools need to use the English media as well as the French media to publicize their activities. It would help to have more French television stations offered

with basic cable services. As well, more French music needs to be heard on English stations such as Much Music. Awareness of resources is of vital importance. Associations exist that provide valuable resources, but they are not publicized enough. For example, AJF (Association Jeunesse Fransaskoise) works with both francophone and immersion students.

All schools need to re-evaluate how much money is going to arts, culture, and sports, especially in French.

Role models within the community, such as French speaking Western Hockey League players, could excite students about French programs. As well, French-speaking youth volunteers could become coaches or mentors to students.

Immersion schools should have at least one bilingual administrator.

Conclusions/Closing

Following each group's summary of their afternoon discussions, Donna Bruce asked the conference participants to reflect on the discussions of the day. The floor was opened to any additional comments that might have been overlooked.

A participant noted that in the Saskatchewan context, the aboriginal population must be taken into consideration if the Action Plan objectives are to be met. Research needs to be done to investigate existing trilingual programs to provide models for programs in our aboriginal communities.

Throughout the conference, there were a number of viable initiatives put forth. A participant asked if they would be implemented through the school divisions and provincial budget or through the federal government grants. Once implemented, where is the money going to come from to sustain these projects? In response to this question, a representative from Saskatchewan Learning said that there was funding available through the federal plan but accessible through Saskatchewan Learning. These grants work on five-year plans, which provides some sustainability. Provincially, money is very tight and therefore less accessible for these projects. Guidelines for these federal grants are still being outlined so there is room for more applications to be made.

Another participant asked who would take the initiative in these projects. Are individuals supposed to be responsible for seeing these proposals through, or is the provincial government going to take some responsibility for this? The same representative from Saskatchewan Learning replied that there would be some support on behalf of the province to take the initiative in larger projects.

A participant noted that all education has funding concerns. These concerns not only involve lack of funds but also the inefficient distribution of the funds. Initiatives that lie outside the realm of education also need funding. Where does funding for these projects come from?

In response to this question, other participants commented that the guidelines for federal funding have not yet been outlined so there may in fact be some accessibility there. As well, Saskatchewan Sport and Culture may be able to provide funding.

There is a problem with research in Saskatchewan, said a participant. The Action Plan notes that most research funding will continue to be provided through the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council; however, there are not enough researchers in Saskatchewan working on these topics. Issues such as the aboriginal population and trilingual projects are not being looked at with respect to the National Report. There needs to be quality research done specifically on some of the issues unique to Saskatchewan, such as travel distances for some students.

Bilingualism cannot exclude trilingualism, said another. Bilingualism opens the door for the opportunity to become trilingual. However, this issue was ignored nationally, and must be considered.

As well, participants had a number of questions and concerns about follow-up plans.

Following the discussion a gift was presented to Karen Taylor Browne on behalf of the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages.

The CPF vice president, Rose-Marie Bouvier, thanked all those involved in the conference for making it happen. Appreciation was extended to the students, teachers, administrators, staff, and governments who will help achieve whatever success follows.

A challenge was issued by conference facilitator Donna Bruce for those who are passionate and interested in the cause to commit to working on the committee to designate tasks that will initiate the projects outlined today. CPF-SK has that list should the national office want it.