



# **STRATEGY for completing the French language education system in Canada**

## Summary of

the report of the Steering Committee on  
the inventory of needs of  
French-language school boards in Canada

October 2004



# Steering Committee

This is a summary of a report prepared by the Steering Committee responsible for the inventory of needs of French-language school boards across Canada. Serving on the committee were:

Edgar Gallant, Chair  
Marielle Beaulieu, Executive Director, FCFA (succeeded Richard Barrette)  
Chantal Bourbonnais, Project Manager, FNCSF  
Paul Charbonneau, Executive Director, FNCSF  
Madeleine Chevalier, Chair, FNCSF  
Catherine Chung-How, Department of Canadian Heritage (observer)  
Raymond Daigle, consultant  
Henri Lemire, Chair, RNDGÉ  
Jean-Guy Rioux, board member, FCFA  
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Anne Scotton, Ministry of Intergovernmental Affairs (observer)

English translation of the summary of the report prepared in French by  
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## Summary

The stakeholders in French-language education for francophone communities in minority situation believe that the time has come for a full educational system, in the spirit of section 23 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. The Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones (FNCSF) [national federation of French-language school boards] set up a steering committee to produce an inventory of needs remaining to be filled to attain this goal. The report is the result of several studies undertaken for this purpose. It consists of three parts: the context French-language education in minority situation, the priority needs identified to complete the educational system, and the proposals for action to achieve its completion.



## Context

Examination of the situation suggests that it is necessary to put the student back at the centre of education concerns, since the school population covered by section 23 of the *Charter* (children of rights holders) is constantly decreasing as francophone communities are whittled away by assimilation and threatened by intermarriage. Because of this, the expectations for the remaining children are heightened, in the hope that they will do well in school, continue postsecondary studies, develop a strong identity, become leaders in their communities and bilingual Canadian citizens, and so on. The challenges facing the schools are substantial. Is the current school model borrowed from the majority community adequate to meet such challenges?

The legal context, on the other hand, is conducive to launching a major campaign for French-language education. Over the last decade, the courts have gradually clarified the scope of section 23, by establishing that it provides a collective right to minority parents, and that its objective is to “preserve and

promote the minority language and culture throughout Canada”. Its scope is political, community-based, educational and administrative. It is political because section 23 commits governments to redress past wrongs and bring about a genuine equality between the majorities and the minorities; it also empowered parents to manage educational institutions. It is community-based because the courts recognize that communities have the right to separate French-language schools, which are also expected to fulfill a cultural role in these communities. It is educational because the courts recognize the right of minority parents to identify their own educational needs, to establish educational programs that will meet these needs, and to expect equality of results. It is administrative because the courts have at long last recognized the exclusive responsibilities of minority school boards and the corresponding obligations of governments.

**Seven exclusive powers of French-language school boards**

- *The power to spend funds to ensure instruction in the minority language*
- *The power to appoint and direct the administrative staff of school boards and schools*
- *The power to determine programs of instruction*
- *The power to recruit and assign teaching and non-teaching staff*
- *The power to make agreements to ensure teaching and other services are provided to minority-language students*
- *The power to determine the educational and extracurricular needs of minority communities*
- *The power to decide the location of school facilities*

**Five affirmative duties of the public authorities in the area of French-language instruction**

- *The duty to correct historical injustices*
- *The duty to offer and promote French-language instruction*
- *The duty to ensure the quality of French-language instruction*
- *The duty to reorganize school structures*
- *The duty to meet the needs of francophone communities*

The political context itself is also favourable for a new comprehensive strategy for French-language education. Duality continues to be a value espoused by the majority of Canadians, while the government has upped its commitment with the 2003 Action Plan for Official Languages. Also, the renewal of the federal *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* recognizes the development needs of official-language minority communities. Recent initiatives at the provincial and territorial level have also strengthened the principle of Canada's duality, for example by Ministers responsible for Francophone Affairs and the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada...

## Needs

On behalf of the FNCSF, researchers conducted two consultations with the 30 minority-community French-language school boards across Canada to determine their priority needs. A prioritizing exercise produced the following list of thirteen needs:

### ***Priority needs of minority French-language school boards***

- *Secondary-school programs*
- *Language actualization programs*
- *Recruitment of permanent, full-time teaching staff*
- *Construction of new schools*
- *Renovation and repair of existing schools*
- *Recruitment of specialist teachers*
- *Specialized services in French (e.g. remedial teachers, psychologists)*
- *Pre-school francization programs*
- *Early childhood and daycare services*
- *Recruitment of administrative staff*
- *Welcome/support/accompaniment programs for non-francophone parents*
- *Promotion of French-language education*
- *Identification and recruitment of the school population targeted by section 23*

Over and above these needs, common to the great majority of school boards, other needs, no less important for many boards, were also identified. These include:

- Distance teaching/video conferencing capability/educational channel
- Full-time kindergartens
- Teaching resources and materials
- Recruitment of substitute teaching staff
- Training and retaining of teaching staff
- Improved access to French-language postsecondary studies
- Training of support staff
- Retaining of administrative staff
- Extracurricular cultural activities
- Child-care programs
- Networking among schools in a given province/territory and across the country
- Family literacy
- Liaison with non-educational community organizations
- Community marketing campaigns
- Raising immigrant awareness

A further consultation with some fifty community organizations on the best ways for school boards to contribute to the overall development of Canada's francophone and Acadian communities produced the following suggestions:

***Suggestions from community organizations***

- *create a consultation committee on education in each school district;*
- *recruit the maximum number of eligible children, including those of mixed marriages;*
- *integrate all levels of education (preschool, K-12, postsecondary);*
- *hire a full-time person to coordinate community efforts aimed at integrating the community into the curriculum and the school into the community;*
- *fully integrate arts and culture into the curriculum and extracurricular activities;*
- *allow not-for-profit community organizations to use school premises for their activities (or build joint school-community centres for French-language schools).*

## Actions

Given that the present legal and political environments are conducive to the full implementation of an education system for Canada's minority francophone and Acadian communities and that their needs are clearly defined, the Steering Committee makes the following recommendations in a framework of seven focuses for action:

### *Focus 1: Identification, recruitment and retention of eligible students*

- 1. That the Department of Canadian Heritage, in cooperation with the Council of Education Ministers, Canada (CMEC), recognize a criterion of promoting French-language schools and recruiting, francizing and retaining the school population targeted by section 23 of the Charter, within its Official Languages in Education Program (OLEP) and allocate a portion of the available budget to the school boards.*
- 2. That the FNCSF plan and coordinate the promotion of French-language schools and, for that purpose, establish a network of discussion and expertise, in which the provincial and territorial education ministers would play an active part.*
- 3. That the federal government give special attention to the recommendations of the Commissioner of Official Languages and the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne (FCFA) [federation of francophone and Acadian communities] regarding francophone immigration to Canada's provinces and*

*territories, with the object of actively promoting French-language schools amongst new immigrants.*

4. *That local communities and schools, provided with adequate resources, make greater efforts to welcome and integrate francophone immigrants, in order to contribute to maintaining Canada's linguistic duality and multiculturalism.*

## **Focus 2: School infrastructures**

5. *That the federal authorities create a budget envelope for the purpose of assisting the provinces and territories to support the building needs of French-language school boards, especially the construction of new schools wherever the numbers warrant. The envelope should take into account the spaces set aside for kindergartens, nursery schools and daycare services in the school community.*
6. *That the concept of school-community centres remain one of the principal options in the planning of new buildings, without in any way pre-empting other formulas better suited to the needs of urban contexts.*

## **Focus 3: Recruitment, training and retention of qualified French-speaking staff**

7. *That the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, in support of initiatives by provincial education ministries and faculties of education, set up a French-language education*

*sectoral council to develop a proactive strategy on replacing, recruiting, training and retaining appropriate human resources in the field of education.*

#### **Focus 4: Early childhood services**

8. *That Social Development Canada, in partnership with other federal and provincial/territorial departments and agencies with responsibilities for early childhood services and with the cooperation of the Commission nationale des parents francophones [national commission of francophone parents] (and, as appropriate, with the Fédération canadienne pour l'alphabétisation en français [Canadian federation for francophone literacy]), formulate a ten-year development plan for early-childhood programs for minority francophone and Acadian communities.*

#### **Focus 5: Academic programs and pedagogical resources**

9. *That the CMEC, in collaboration with the FNCSF, consider setting up a working group responsible for formulating a strategy to ensure, within a five- to ten-year period, the availability of quality of French-language programming at the secondary education level throughout the country. Preparation for and access to postsecondary education should be included within this strategy.*
10. *That, in renewing OLEP, Canadian Heritage, in cooperation with the CMEC, earmark a portion of its budget envelope for a national strategy for the development and dissemination of teaching resources designed by and for minority francophone and Acadian*

*communities. The implementation of the strategy would be undertaken by the FNCSF, in collaboration with the ministries of education.*

- 11. That the federal, provincial and territorial authorities consider investing the resources necessary for the networking and advanced technologies required to set up distance education, first at the secondary level and, later, at the elementary level.*
- 12. That the CMEC and the FNCSF, with the support of Canadian Heritage, consider setting up a cross-Canada educational and community television service with the primary mandate of providing educational programming to school boards.*

### **Focus 6: Linguistic and cultural support**

- 13. That provincial, territorial and federal institutions, in close collaboration with the Fédération culturelle canadienne française [French-Canadian cultural federation] set up a socio-cultural support program for schools in francophone and Acadian communities.*

### **Focus 7: Implementation**

#### Nationally:

- 14. That the ministries of education, the federal authorities and the FNCSF establish a permanent consultative mechanism responsible for supporting the implementation of a global strategy for French-*

*language education in minority communities in Canada, in consultation with key education and community stakeholders.*

15. *That a priority of the permanent consultative mechanism be the examination and possible redesign of government programs affecting the academic development of minority francophone and Acadian communities, particularly those programs that are part of the federal Action Plan for Official Languages.*

Provincially and territorially:

16. *That the ministries of education, the departments responsible for francophone affairs and francophone school boards set up a permanent consultation mechanism responsible for overseeing the implementation of the French-language education strategy at the provincial/territorial level, in consultation with key education and community stakeholders. In some provinces and territories, this could be handled by mechanisms already in place.*

17. *That francophone school boards or their representative associations be formally informed and consulted throughout the planning, development and execution of all initiatives, intergovernmental negotiations, proposed legislation and programs pertaining to the education of the francophone minority under their jurisdiction.*

At the level of school boards and schools:

18. *That the administrators of French-language school boards and schools work together with other community stakeholders in*

*planning and implementing the French-language education strategy, in a manner that strengthens school-community links.*

Regarding funding:

19. *That, following the redesign of programs according to the preceding recommendations, a corresponding budget adjustment be made to reflect the real needs of the French language educational system.*
20. *That the FNCSF set up a group of expert financial advisors to assist school boards and their respective governments to submit a recovery plan containing the necessary adjustments to the various funding formulas likely to lead to equality in this area.*
21. *That the federal government guarantee the FNCSF adequate annual core funding to enable it to play the coordinating role proposed for it in this report.*

Accountability:

22. *That the permanent consultative mechanism develop and supervise an accountability framework for the full achievement of all measures and initiatives designed to complete the French language education system in Canada. A progress report on the implementation should be prepared and made public annually.*

The FNCSF invites you to join in the planning of this collective action. Over the course of the coming winter, the Steering Committee's report will be assessed and validated by French-language school boards and other French-language education stakeholders in Canada. The result of this process will

become a working instrument for the *États généraux de la francophonie en éducation* [general francophone assembly on education] planned for May 2005. A genuine action plan, involving all stakeholders in education, should result from this assembly and be fully implemented by 2015.

It is in the interest of Canada as a whole to ensure that the schools serving francophone minority communities are in a position to give their students a quality education, equal to that available to the students of the majority.

The Canada-wide linguistic duality is at the heart of the Canadian identity and vital to national unity. The continued attenuation of the francophone and Acadian communities will lead to a dangerous weakening of this core feature of Canadian identity and militate against the objective of national unity.

It has become urgent to fill the academic, extracurricular and community needs identified by French-language school boards and other community organizations: the constitutional obligations of governments, federal as well as provincial/territorial, require it; the survival of Canada-wide linguistic duality depends on it; the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* prescribes it, and it is the condition necessary to ensure that francophone and Acadian communities can participate in and contribute fully to the vitality of Canadian society.

