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• (0905)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.)): Hello everybody.

[English]

Welcome to this meeting.

[Translation]

It is a pleasure this morning to welcome the Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones (National Federation of French-Language School Boards). I thank them for being here. This part of the meeting will finish at about 10:30 a.m. Then we will go over the details of future meetings' subjects for discussion.

Without further due, I'd like to hand the floor over to you. I would invite you to make a brief presentation. Then, we will start a discussion with committee members.

Ms. Chevalier, could you also introduce the person who is with you today please?

Ms. Madeleine Chevalier (Chair, Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, members. Thank you for inviting us to appear at your inquiry into minority-language education.

My name is Madeleine Chevalier, and I am the president of the Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones. Mr. Paul Charbonneau, our director general, is with me today.

As you know, the 30 francophone school boards throughout Canada that we represent, have a constitutional obligation. They must provide education for the francophone minority in its own language, education that is of equal quality to that available to students in the majority. This responsibility falls on our shoulders and to the provincial, territorial and federal governments. We are appearing before you in the interest of completely fulfilling this responsibility.

We will take a few minutes to present the current status of French-language education and its needs, and we'll then present our strategy to complete this system, in accordance with the vision set out in section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

The current status of our education system is worrisome. In short, we might say that it is on life support. We are very far from achieving the community vitality set out in the Official Languages Act.

Since 1982, our education rights have of course been guaranteed by the Charter, and you know how hard our francophone and Acadian communities have worked to have the courts fully recognize these rights. The Supreme Court of Canada had to hand down three landmark decisions—the Mahé decision in 1990, the Manitoba Reference in 1993 and the Arsenault-Cameron in 2000—to force the provincial and territorial governments to grant school governance to the francophone minority. In the meantime, the door was left open to assimilation by the various bans a century ago that caused French-language instruction to disappear or struggle along throughout Canada.

In the last 15 years or so, we have had considerable success, gradually establishing 31 French-language school boards that now oversee about 675 schools. We are proud to watch over the instruction that is provided to these 150,000 or so students, and the expectations are quite high. In addition to meeting Canadian education standards, we also want our students to learn about their culture, history and the values of their society; and we would like them to develop pride in their language, awareness of being a minority, a strong identity, community leadership and knowledge of a number of languages.

In what circumstances do we undertake this mission? To gain a clearer picture, our Federation recently commissioned an assessment of our schools' needs. Among the 50 or so important needs expressed by French-language school boards, about 12 are commonly regarded as priorities. Moreover, we consulted about 50 community organizations which validated these needs overall and clearly expressed the importance of bringing the school and community closer together in order to support the community's ethnolinguistic vitality.

As you know, the lack of French-language schools or their poor standards in Canada over the past century have dramatically reduced the eligible enrolment under section 23 of the Charter. This “past injustice”, as the Supreme Court called it, has meant that just over half the children of rights holders now attend French-language schools. These schools lack resources now. They cannot offer a range of programs of study, specialized services and equipment comparable to what is offered in rival English-language or immersion schools. Their infrastructure is often outdated or inadequate. They lack teachers and administrative staff.

They also have needs that are specific to their minority status as they must recruit rights holders and promote the school to them, francize young people before and even while they are enrolled in school, and welcome and assist exogamous parents.

Finally, to increase their chances of success, schools must be able to count on early childhood and daycare services that prepare children to be educated in French.

● (0910)

We have noted that school boards, provincial and territorial governments and the federal government are not fully meeting their obligations to the Francophone minority as embodied in part VII of the Official Languages Act, the Charter and the constitutional principle of the protection of minorities. A shift in direction is therefore urgently needed to correct this situation.

How do we go about this? How can education rights set out in section 23 be fully implemented? Our Federation has adopted the strategy put forward by its steering committee, which is chaired by Mr. Gallant. This action strategy is based on the needs assessment and on the current legal and political framework.

First of all, we consider that the education rights of official-language minorities have now being clearly established by the case law. We advocate diligently implementing them rather than continuing to fight before the courts. At the political level, the federal government's long awaited renewed interest in linguistic duality signals a new approach to French-language minority school governance.

The 2003 Action Plan for Official Languages promises new investments and has high expectations as it aims to increase the enrolment of eligible Francophone students to 80% by 2013. In our opinion, a concerted strategy on the part of community stakeholders, school boards, and the provincial, territorial and federal governments will be the only way to meet this challenge.

We believe the provinces and territories are now open to consider such a strategy. A representative of the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, also took part in our steering committee's work and will soon meet with the office of the Conférence ministérielle sur les affaires francophones. We also have meetings scheduled with the chief education officers of the provinces and territories and with senior federal officials.

At the community level, our federation has rallied the key organizations with a mandate relating to education. There is the Association canadienne d'éducation de langue française, the Commission nationale des parents francophones; the Fédération culturelle canadienne-française; the Fédération canadienne des enseignantes et enseignants; the Fédération canadienne pour l'alphabétisation en français; the Réseau des cégeps et collèges francophones du Canada; the Association des universités de la francophonie canadienne; the Alliance canadienne des responsables, des enseignants et enseignantes en français langue maternelle; and the Fédération de la jeunesse canadienne-française.

We are now working together on the action plan to fulfill the promise of section 23. In addition, we intend to invite provincial, territorial and federal government officials to take part in this exercise, since it is their responsibility as well. In this regard, next June we will be holding a deliberative assembly for education's stakeholders on the implementation of section 23 in minority Francophone communities.

As your committee correctly noted, education continues to be regarded as a continuum, from early childhood to the post-secondary level. While our primary interest is the school system, we cannot ignore early childhood services that prepare students, the problem of family illiteracy that conditions students, and the prospect of continuing French-language education at college or university.

Our strategy thus comprises six avenues for action to revitalize the education system: the identification, recruitment and retention of eligible school enrolment; school infrastructures; the recruitment, training and retention of employees who are competent in French; early childhood services; school programs and teaching resources; and linguistic and cultural training and guidance.

Given the number of players involved in this strategy we recommend that permanent coordination mechanisms be established which will include representatives of all school boards, governments and communities.

We are also seeking a complete re-assessment of the budget in order to include the investments required by this strategy. The Official Languages in Education Program is of course a key tool in furthering this strategy, but it should not be the only one.

● (0915)

The federal government to which you make your recommendations must also increase its funding for various priorities: human resources development in the education sector; establishment of school infrastructures; support for the leadership shown by school boards and community organizations; support for early childhood; support for the technical networking of schools and communities; and support for the socio-cultural component of teaching young francophones.

It is helpful to recall that the case law has clearly recognized that the school boards have the authority to define the needs of their own community and to spend the funds provided for minority-language education. Moreover, the highest court has ruled that the funding provided to minority-language schools must be at least equivalent to that provided to the majority and sometimes even more, in view of their specific needs.

Finally, the action plan should include an accountability framework to ensure its transparency and to promote the attainment of its objectives.

In closing, we reiterate the urgent needs relating to French-language minority education. The number of rights holders is decreasing because a good many of their children are not currently enrolled in French-language schools. As a result, these children will not in turn be able to pass their rights on to their own children. The future of Canada's linguistic duality is at stake if we do not maintain the vitality of the francophone minority.

Our school boards are aware of this. With the help of our community organizations, they have begun serious initiatives to change the circumstances for their future. The federal government must still be convinced of the importance and urgency of this strategy. We sincerely hope that your committee will assist us in this regard.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Chevalier.

We will now go to questions and answers, until about 10:30 a.m. We will start with Mr. Poilievre.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Nepean—Carleton, CPC): First of all, I want to thank you for your work and your comments. Thank you for being here.

I have read that parents throughout the country are showing greater interest in the French education system, and that more and more parents are sending their children to French schools and to immersion schools.

Is that true? Is that putting more pressure on the system?

Ms. Madeleine Chevalier: The school systems always work hand in hand with parents: parents are the clients of the school systems. So each school board must listen to its clientele to be in a position to provide the services that are the most beneficial to that clientele.

I do not know if you are aware that in Ontario, among other places, we integrated junior kindergartens, for children aged 4 and 5, into the school system over 10 years ago, precisely to help them master their mother tongue at a young age, so that when these children start grade one, they are better prepared to learn.

Bear in mind as well that francophones are, to an even larger extent than before, living in a minority environment. I cannot speak for immersion schools. We have absolutely nothing to do with immersion schools. We deal solely with French schools.

Is that putting more pressure on the system? I would say that we are really talking about synergy, not only among parents, but also among community organizations and school systems, to truly develop an education system that enhances the vitality of the francophone community.

• (0920)

Mr. Paul Charbonneau (Executive Director, Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones): If there is pressure, it stands from the fact that we currently only have half of the people who are entitled to French school in our schools. The other half, approximately 150,000 children, would like to be there, but in many cases, they are having problems accessing it. We realize, when we build a French school, that it fills up quickly and that it is quickly overpopulated. If we look at Halifax, for example, the first school and community centre was built, and five or six years later, they needed twice as much space.

Pressure comes from the fact that many young people who have a constitutional right to French school do not necessarily have the language proficiency to register in junior kindergarten. So that means that the French school must provide francisation and preparatory classes. However, we are facing not only a lack of space, but a budget shortfall. There is a lot of talk about an early childhood program that would prepare children aged 2 and 3 for our schools. But at present, due to a lack of resources, means and facilities, we have school boards that are denying access to children who, in fact, could challenge this situation in the courts.

[English]

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Well, I think one of you made the remark that in early years children have a mind that's much like a sponge for

languages. That's why I think the work you're doing is particularly important. I know you don't work with immersion programs, but I am interested in that, and I imagine you do have some tangential expertise in that area.

I'm wondering, if you're comfortable commenting on it, how we can encourage increased enrolment in immersion programs, because I believe if you want to promote linguistic duality, that is where you have to start. If you want to actually increase the number of people in Red Deer, Alberta, or Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, or Saint John, New Brunswick, who speak French, speak the two languages, in the long run, you have to start at a very young age. When someone reaches a career level they find it very difficult to learn a second language.

So how do we, as a country, promote more enrolment in immersion programs?

[Translation]

Ms. Madeleine Chevalier: I think it is very important for you to understand the concept of immersion schools. An immersion school is not a school for a francophone. An immersion school is a school where a second language is taught, for example French is taught to anglophones. So the approach is very different.

French schools have a dual mandate: language and culture. But culture comes from deep within, from our individual backgrounds, from the way in which we were raised, from our ancestors, from the history of Canada. So that is something that is not translated, but something that you simply experience. That is why we are here today to talk about French schools. We are certainly in favour of immersion schools for anglophones, so that they can have an easier time learning their second language, French.

Mr. Paul Charbonneau: In fact, you said earlier that to promote linguistic duality in Canada, anglophones needed to learn French. I agree entirely. However, we must ensure, first and foremost, that francophones outside Quebec preserve their language. In my opinion, a government that clearly states its position on linguistic duality is, at the same time, encouraging the majority to learn the French language.

However, it will be difficult to convince a young Albertan to attend an immersion school if his environment is made up entirely of assimilated francophones who do not speak French. So, we must start by making sure that we still have French Canadians. After that, promoting duality will also lead to—and we are already seeing this—an increased enrolment in immersion.

For the rest, as regards language, it is clear that regardless of whether we are talking about a child first or second language, the younger the child learns it the better.

• (0925)

[English]

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Don't mistake my remarks to suggest that I was taking away from the importance of francophone schools by asking about immersion schools. It just happens to be another area of interest of mine.

Back to francophone schools, what interest level are you seeing from francophone parents in a minority context in continuing to pass along their cultural traditions through a francophone education system?

[Translation]

Ms. Madeleine Chevalier: As I mentioned earlier, parents are the school system's clients. Thus, school boards are responsible for meeting parents' needs and expectations. So there is a very very close link.

Mr. Paul Charbonneau: Parents elect school trustees on most of our boards. So they are quite involved. The interest clearly lies in all homogeneous families. We have about 90 % of homogeneous francophone families. For the others, the difficulty is not a lack of interest, but since there are no schools close by, since there is no family support when the family is bilingual, that complicates matters somewhat.

However, there are more and more members of that clientele who are increasingly aware that the best way of becoming bilingual is to attend a French school. In the past, many exogamous couples registered their children in immersion schools. More and more people are realizing that the most bilingual people in the country are francophones in a minority environment. That alone gives us a promotional tool that no one else has.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Poilievre.

We will move on now to Mr. André.

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Good morning, and welcome to the committee. I'm delighted to have the opportunity to meet you.

Firstly, I would like to speak to you about early childhood services. You said that, in some provinces, the francophone minorities are facing significant levels of assimilation. Given the difficulties that you face in terms of financial resources, equipment, and so forth, it would appear that the importance placed on French in both the federal policy on official languages and its school management policy is, at the end of the day, somewhat questionable.

You do not have all the resources that you require in order to fully assume your leadership role in matters of French language and culture in Canada. You have your work cut out for you. I would like to congratulate you on all the work that you do and your will and determination to provide services to French-speaking families and children.

Experts agree that the crucial period for learning a language is when a child is between two and five years old. Yet almost 50 per cent of children are assimilated before the age of five and do not go to a French school. This means that there is a fairly significant rate of assimilation.

I believe that you are proposing the introduction of an early childhood daycare service which could be housed within the French-language school network. I think that a French-speaking early childhood network would provide parents and children with a multitude of services adapted to their needs in areas such education, health and social services. This could be an excellent initiative. I understand that the project is still being developed, and I would like, therefore, to hear more from you about it.

You spoke about early childhood services. There has also been talk of integrating services networks at a school management level. Has progress been made on this front? Is there anything in the pipeline at the moment?

Mr. Paul Charbonneau: In fact, the group which is acting as the spokesperson for the francophonie aspect of this initiative is the Commission nationale des parents francophones. The members of the commission are responsible for promoting the initiative and we support them through our strategy. Our strategy brings together the best initiatives of the various stakeholders. The commission promotes the early childhood centres. These centres provide a preschool service for children aged zero to three, offering both educational and social support, given that sometimes work has to be done with the families.

On that same subject, we appeared before the Senate committee yesterday, as did the CNPF. I know that they are involved in talks with Mr. Dryden's department. However, there was no further news on what was discussed during the weekend, that is to say, whether the issue of French-speaking minorities was raised during this discussion.

In our view, it is extremely important to have this sort of infrastructure. It ought to be as near to the school as possible, preferably in the school, and, without any doubt, it ought to be managed by parents. We have to quickly accustom parents and children to going to a French-language school, which is a public institution, even if we do not want children as young as three to be part of the school system, and even if we do not want this to be transferred to the departments of education. If we cannot achieve this, then it will not work.

● (0930)

Mr. Guy André: It is absolutely essential. If people send their children to a French-language primary school, be it in kindergarten or grade 1, but have to enroll them in an English-speaking daycare centre, there is clearly a major problem.

Mr. Paul Charbonneau: It requires an inordinate amount of effort. I have four children from a mixed marriage; two "Newfies" and two born in Buffalo. We had to go to incredible lengths to ensure that our children spoke French, especially since my partner at the time was English-speaking. In a sense, I was paid to be French-speaking, because give or take a few years, I was always involved in the various networks.

In an effort to help our children maintain their French, and use it regularly, we even got a dog on the condition that they spoke to it in French. I resisted buying a new television, because by taking a button off our old set, the children had no choice but to always watch cartoons in French.

I realized that I was one of the few parents in a mixed marriage whose children went to French-language school. Today, between work and commuting, we only see our children a couple of hours a day. It is therefore essential that they go to French-language school.

There are currently two community initiatives underway. However, it is important that these initiatives be structured, because if children are unable to develop a sense of identity as a Francophone between the ages of zero and three, then it will be extremely difficult for us to instill this identity in them when they are four or five years old.

Mr. Guy André: Do you think that section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms is applicable in this instance?

Mr. Paul Charbonneau: I believe that both section 23 and the various court rulings are relatively clear on this point. Jurisprudence binds us to an obligation of result. We do not have to have the same schools as Anglophones, but our results have to be as good as theirs.

We made a mistake at the beginning, when we were setting up our schools and school boards. I was a member of that group at the time. We were not experts in the field. What we wanted was to have local schools like the ones for the English-speaking community, but in French. We wanted a school board like the one which already existed, but in French.

We therefore recreated the existing model, with a few minor exceptions. We have French-language schools which teach English as a second language. Furthermore, with a few minor exceptions, our school board is subject to exactly the same legislation and regulations. However, experience has taught us that that was perhaps not what we needed. That is why we have a strategy.

Our schools work fairly well. I can say without hesitation that things are going well in those schools where the student population is uniform, where that is not the case, however, things are not going so well. We should perhaps have approached the way the school was structured, as well as its programs and curriculum, differently. Given that we have the obligation of results, we ought to be in a position to offer kindergarten for four and five year olds in all of our schools. It is certainly reasonable to argue that we need to create a different school system.

Mr. Guy André: Are there any moves in that direction? You have met with Minister Dryden. Did he seem open to such a proposal?

Mr. Paul Charbonneau: It was the CPF, not us, who met with Mr. Dryden. We have, however, been told that this is a possibility.

Mr. Guy André: I think that it is absolutely critical.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. André.

We will move on to Mr. Godin.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would like to wish you a warm welcome to the committee.

You said earlier that you did not want to have the same style of schools as the English-speaking community, but that you wanted to obtain the same results. You also said that, when compared to English-speaking schools, you are underfunded.

Could you provide us with some more information on these points?

Ms. Madeleine Chevalier: It's more expensive to teach in French: that has been proven. For example, our books cost more and our resources are more scattered. As we've just mentioned, we must offer

services to the 4 and 5 year-olds: we know how important children's integration is at that age. Of course, with all the changes that have happened and all the budget decreases imposed by the different levels of government, we've had to look at doing things in other ways. However, there comes a time when it's impossible to function. We have now reached the limit.

I know that education systems have been targeted for rather drastic reductions. In Ontario, the last school board was created 10 years ago. There was major restructuring, the goal being, of course, to save money. Now, we're living with the consequences. All these changes came with a heavy penalty for francophones.

• (0935)

Mr. Yvon Godin: Do you get the impression that the \$700 million of the Dion plan are helping change a few things? Is the money going where it should or do you still have to fight despite those funds you're getting? Have the provinces really understood that those funds should be used to improve the situation of their French schools or, as you were saying before, the situation of the children? I have a lot of questions but we don't have much time. I'd just like you to give me a general idea of what I want to know.

At the present time, we're talking about a national daycare system like the one in Quebec. Is there going to be any room for the francophone population? As you were saying, when 5 year-old children go to the anglophone daycare centres first, it's already too late. What are your concerns? Are things moving in the right direction or, as the case may be, is progress fast enough?

Mr. Paul Charbonneau: As for the daycare centres, I don't know how the mechanics of that will operate. As for the matter of federal-provincial relations, I'll just give you the example of official languages in education. I think that will give you a good idea of our concerns.

Theoretically, the federal government is supposed to have two ways of helping fund our schools. There's the protocol on official languages in teaching, a multilateral agreement where all the provinces must agree on the wording and which the bilateral agreements flow from. That's been in existence since the 1970s. In parallel, there's what has been called the Dion plan that was supposed to come up with bilateral agreements with those provinces that wished it.

As far as we're concerned, when the Dion plan was announced, we applauded. After all, this plan does have \$209 million for education in French as the first language. There wasn't that much new money because \$179 million had been put into it during the five years prior. So that meant \$30 million more and, at least, it gave a permanent status to that budget. We mainly applauded the fact that the Dion plan was to have an accountability mechanism and the kind of transparency we don't have in the protocol negotiated with the Council of ministers of education.

I think the amounts paid out by the federal government aren't all that huge. It's \$90 million a year out of a budget of \$1.5 billion for the 30-odd school boards we represent. Generally speaking, the federal government funds between 5 and 6 per cent of the budget in the area of supplementary costs in education.

However, in the historical program, some things have always bothered us. There were some positive results. When we set up some school boards, the federal government helped to build them up during 5 and even 10 years. You can see concrete results in the school and community centre projects. It's clear that if there's a community aspect, there is a federal contribution. However, there are so many cases where we don't know what is done with the money because we're not part of the process and we can't really answer. We have always deplored the fact that the agreement with the provinces has not changed since we've obtained our school boards. However, the school boards should have made a difference.

Just as an aside, I'll mention the courts. It's not because we want to wind up there, but there's enough case law to throw light on the matter. The courts have said that the school boards, or a homogenous francophone authority or structure are the only ones authorized to make decisions on any matter of language and culture having to do with education. Now, when there are negotiations between a province and the federal government on education, we don't even know what action plan the province is putting forth. We will often hear about it 6 or 12 months after the money has been spent. Nevertheless, our departments of education are not homogeneous structures. They have a bilingual division within an anglophone department. So the federal government should make it mandatory for the provinces to talk to us before they present their plan to the federal government. However, we're not there yet although we are a constitutionally recognized school board.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Would your recommendation be that you should take part in those negotiations.

Mr. Paul Charbonneau: Yes.

Ms. Madeleine Chevalier: Absolutely.

Mr. Yvon Godin: It brings to mind the infrastructure for municipalities: it's one third, one third, one third and the municipalities don't participate in the negotiations. It could be looked at in the same way. You should be the ones benefiting but you're not part of the negotiations so you don't know where the money is going.

Mr. Paul Charbonneau: Moreover, as the Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones, we are the only level of government that has any constitutional rationale, together with the federal and provinces. They could shut down all the school boards of the majority everywhere in the country but they couldn't shut ours down. Actually, in your province, in New Brunswick, they did try to shut down all the school boards. If they recreated them, it's because they couldn't shut down the Acadian school boards because of clause 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

So we should be there. That would help the federal government to find out where its money is going. To come back to the New Brunswick example, how is it that the per capita for a student in a rural area is the same for an anglophone and an Acadian? The per capita in New Brunswick, in urban areas, is the same for an anglophone as for an Acadian. What are they doing with that money? We have extra costs. In my opinion, that money goes straight to the consolidated fund. We can't even tell you where that money is going.

● (0940)

The Chair: Mr. Godin, your time is up. We've noted the recommendation. Thank you very much.

We will carry on with Ms. Boivin.

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, Lib.): If we could apply the same principle at the municipal, provincial and federal levels, that would be marvellous. I agree with Mr. Godin on that.

What I always finds striking with linguistic minorities is that there are a lot of organizations working very hard, just as you, actually, for certain missions. Amongst others, in looking at your statutes and by-laws, I can see that you mentioned that you have adopted the mission of "demanding that the federal government respect the education rights of francophones and Acadians". I can see that other organizations have roughly the same mission amongst others, the Alliance canadienne des responsables, des enseignantes et des enseignants en français langue maternelle, also known as ACREF, the Association canadienne d'éducation de langue française, or ACELF, and the Commission nationale des parents francophones or CNPF. I would like to know if those groups communicate with one another. I sometimes must admit that as I am not working in this area on a daily basis, all those acronyms look like Greek to me. Is there any cooperation?

Mr. Paul Charbonneau: There is now.

Ms. Françoise Boivin: So there is cooperation now.

Mr. Paul Charbonneau: The reason is that it's time to put together our strategy. We want to convince the federal government to get involved because it does have a responsibility even in education. This is the plan of all the stakeholders in education. They all have their niche and, for the most part, they all gravitate around school boards. We are moderating a round table and when we introduce the action plan in June, it will be everyone's plan. That will be the first time that francophones and Acadians are as united nationally since we have been working on this project.

● (0945)

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Now, concerning your strategy to complete the French as a first language education system, you established an action plan with what you call focuses. The one I find of most interest is Focus 3 in your report, on page 10. The heading is, "Recruitment, training and retention of qualified French-speaking staff". As concerns to languages, we often talk about the problem posed by the assimilation of francophones. Based on your own perception and experience, if you have a problem retaining staff, how can you remedy that? What is the problem? Where those people go? Why do you have problems recruiting French-speaking teachers?

Mr. Paul Charbonneau: First of all, we don't have enough machines manufacturing teachers. We do have few faculties. They are very much in demand in our institutions both for core French and immersion. Traditionally, we would recruit them from Quebec but that's also becoming difficult. So there are fewer and fewer possibilities in that area. Not only is there a manufacturing problem, to speak like the teachers, but there is also a problem with preparing those people.

I have a license in education. I can tell you that I barely had enough training to step into a classroom. I had even less to step into a classroom in a minority situation. When you recruit someone in Montreal and bring him over to the Rivière de la Paix area, it is not all that clear cut.

I remember recruiting teachers from Montreal for Grande Terre in Newfoundland-and-Labrador. In Grande Terre there is a convenience store which is of course not opened 24 hours every day and a small bar with a great view of Île Rouge. We are talking of a community of 300 or 400 people at the end of the earth. If you do not prepare them, if you do not explain to them what kind of cultural and geographic situation they are going into, if you do not prepare them for that kind of teaching, they will soon get fed up.

We presented a national strategy to the federal government. The competition amongst ourselves is another problem. It is clear that a teacher earns more in Alberta than in New Brunswick. To avoid that competition, we figured that we had to develop a national plan, recruit for everyone's benefit and develop programs for retention. We could do that too for people working in immersion.

There is a problem at the federal government level. Many public servants don't want to get involved because they consider that education in the language of the minority is a matter that falls under provincial jurisdiction. What we say—and legal opinions show this—is that the federal government has a responsibility in this area of helping the development of minorities. The five unwritten principles were clarified in the referral on Quebec secession where it is spelled out that the federal government has a responsibility in the field of education. That means that the federal government can get directly involved. It cannot change the provincial legislation and regulations but it can get involved nationally. If we don't do that nationally...

We have some school boards for only 250 students. On the other hand, we have school boards for 17,000 students. The poor guy in Newfoundland-and-Labrador trying to recruit on his own simply just can't manage it. So we are making all these attempts, but to-date we haven't had any results.

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Do I have any time left?

The Chair: Yes.

Ms. Françoise Boivin: In terms of your financing, we were talking about delays in the renewal of federal-provincial-territorial agreements in the area of education, agreements that are funded within the framework of the Official Languages Program. What is the impact of each of these delays?

Mr. Paul Charbonneau: First of all, there is no long term planning. I will give you an example. Saskatchewan needs two schools, in Moose Jaw and in Saskatoon. While we are at it, we might as well built community and school centres. Because of the uncertainty hanging over our funding, there are projects that are spread over one, two or three years. Minister Stéphane Dion's action plan is doled out in dribbles from year to year, whereas the protocol is renewed on an interim basis; I hope that will finish this year. Most of the time, there is a tendency to say that we will wait until it is signed. It is true that nothing gets done.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Boivin.

We will begin the second round of questions.

[*English*]

Mr. Scheer, for five minutes.

Mr. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Thank you.

It sounds a little as if the challenges you're facing with coordinating the implementation of some of your strategies with the provinces are with the provinces themselves, in the sense that there's not always the commitment to ensure that there's adequate access to schooling in the minority language.

Your proposal to me, and perhaps you could clarify this, almost sounds as if we need a parallel school system, a national school system that would address the minority rights situation. Is that a good way of putting it, that you might have in any province a public system, a separate system, and then a national federal minority language system?

Mr. Paul Charbonneau: Not really.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Madeleine Chevalier: In fact, each province has its own situation. It is very important to recognize that. However, within this uniqueness, it is important to recognize the right of francophones to receive their education in French, and this comes under Section 23 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

We are simply asking that this be recognized, and that the funding that corresponds to this recognition be granted to us, so that we can obtain the same results in our francophone schools that are obtained in the majority schools.

Mr. Paul Charbonneau: We clearly need to develop many things nationally. We are talking about small school boards which cannot achieve this on their own, as I was saying earlier. Solidarity among the school boards will allow us to have access to more resources. This does not however mean that we are asking for a National Department of Education.

We will have to develop interprovincial cooperation, but the federal government will also have to intensify its support, given that we are discussing minorities here. So long as the federal government considers us as simple creations of the provinces, we will find ourselves endlessly sent back to our respective departments.

In short, the provinces need to work together; the federal government, for its part, can and must support school boards in this regard.

Ms. Madeleine Chevalier: As far as school boards are concerned, it is important to point out that the authorities have created a coalition which allows them to cooperate, to make their work easier and to put an end to the problem of redundancies. In this way, they can pool certain resources, particularly those of the pedagogical nature. This will therefore exist within each of the educational authorities, across the country.

[English]

Mr. Andrew Scheer: Is the idea more that the federal government would provide a level of funding to ensure a minimum of quality, and then work perhaps with a premier or education minister to create almost bilateral agreements with each province in that respect, or is there a need for...? When you say national strategy, are you talking about a federal initiative that's then applied to all the provinces—as one model on every province—or are you talking more about separate agreements with each province, as the need may be?

• (0950)

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Charbonneau: In fact, we are talking about two things here. They will have to be increased by lateral funding. We have always said that the federal government invested a lot. We believe that these investments are quite significant. All in all, \$90 million out of \$1.5 billion is not exactly a huge amount when the issue is to respect the principle of linguistic duality.

Our strategy is to establish a true partnership between the provinces and the federal government. We want thereby to be able to implement our recommendations. Obviously, this will take a different form according to the situation in each of the provinces. This plan will not be imposed on the provinces, but will result in agreements and discussions between the departments of education, our school boards and, we hope, the federal government.

First and foremost, we want the need for the implementation of Section 23 to be recognized. All stakeholders must work with us, including the federal government.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Scheer.

Mr. D'Amours, for five minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would like to thank you for being here this morning. I would like to talk about the Summary of the Report of the steering committee, and in particular Focus 4 and Focus 6. Focus 4 deals with early childhood education and Focus 6 deals with the linguistic and cultural environment.

Everyone agrees that the earlier children learn a language, the easier it is for them to understand it and do well when they start school, in addition to the fact that they generally do better overall.

Focus 6 is interesting because it refers to the cultural environment in school. But there are two realities: school and everything around it, including extracurricular activities. Students often talk to each other in the other language, which means that they don't get enough practice in the first one. It is important that young people participate in cultural activities in French so that they can make progress and start enjoying the language. A lot of good things are happening in French.

Can you give us more details on that subject? In my opinion, it makes sense for Focus 4 and Focus 6 to be based on cultural development.

Mr. Paul Charbonneau: In my view, that's what make the difference for a school located in a minority francophone environment. It's a question of language, but mostly also a matter of cultural reinforcement or sharing, which often occurs in the only homogeneous institution within the community. Activities have to take place in school from the time children are very young, because the kids should be able to take advantage of everything the school has to offer and that way they will be as ready as possible to start school in French. We have to beef up our education programs and cultural activities. In fact, in areas which are less homogeneous, the kids go back to their homes located in English neighbourhoods.

Historically, culture has always been associated with the arts and with the occasional show. Since people did not have a lot of resources, they always put on the same show. The same show was conveniently chosen and made the rounds of all the schools every year. But it's about more than that. The Fédération culturelle canadienne française has proposed mechanisms and a social cultural learning program which we would like to keep. What we actually have to do is update the cultural activities we used to have. I am the first to acknowledge that we insisted a bit too much on folklore. In 2005, it just won't be possible to keep students in French high schools with programs based on folklore. Not only do we have to increase the number of cultural activities, but we also have to modernize them. There are several places where integrated programs work well. In Edmonton, there are theatre companies integrated within schools. The arts and culture centre in Sydney, Nova Scotia, is actually located in a school, and students who take part in the program get academic credits towards their high school diploma.

We're looking at a different way of doing things. Since cultural activities have always taken place outside of schools, the two never crossed path, whether the activities took place within a school or not. But now, we're trying to integrate both, beginning at the early childhood level and continuing through the upper grades.

• (0955)

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: That's very interesting. Before people started talking about early childhood development, young children were tossed—pardon the expression—into first grade. So it was much harder for them to adjust. A stage was skipped. But now, we want to come back to the stage which should not be skipped. Furthermore, this makes sense because it helps develop our culture and make young people aware of it. That's very positive.

I did not quite understand what you said earlier to my colleague from Acadie-Bathurst with regard to the per capita allocation. Perhaps you did not have time to finish what you were saying. Can you please come back to that?

Mr. Paul Charbonneau: It depends on the provinces, but there are provinces where an English-language school board and a French-language school board receive money according to the same funding formula. The best example is New Brunswick. I don't have the figures off the top of my head, but if one school board receives x amount for an anglophone in Moncton, the Acadian school board gets the same amount for an Acadian in Moncton. What we want to know is where do the grants for extra costs go?

It's a per capita issue. Elsewhere, it's totally obscure. A few years ago, we heard about a study they were doing in Nova Scotia to determine where federal funds had been spent. We never saw the report; presumably, they didn't find the answer. We do find out, one year later, about places that got money from the department to do this or that, but we didn't get the results.

In Manitoba, two or three years ago, we met with the assistant deputy minister and asked how many pedagogical resources had been published in French. There had been more money for producing resources in French as a first language than in immersion. I think there was one or five publications in French as a first language versus 45 or 50 in immersion. That made us wonder whether that meant that our money had been given to immersion. I am not 100% sure, but I think that's what happened.

If we don't know the basis on which the provinces are asking for money, if we don't know what they do with it, because the report comes long after the end of the school year, there's nothing we can say, especially when we don't get the money, despite being responsible for about 80% of the school education under the system.

Currently, we can't always tell you what they do with the money.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. D'Amours.

Mr. Desrochers.

Mr. Odina Desrochers (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all, welcome to our Standing Committee on Official Languages.

Since we began our deliberations, I have been listening to the claims you make and the reactions you get from various provincial governments.

Do you feel that the provincial governments have the political will to deal with this problem? Are they just trying to pass the buck to levels with no decision-making power? Do you sense any political will?

Here in Ottawa, both official languages are recognized, and you can go to court under section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, but do you get the sense that there is any political will to settle this issue? I think some provinces couldn't care less about official languages. Do you feel that there is actually any political will? That's where the problem lies.

In terms of your claims, your demands, without going into details, could you give us some kind of ranking of the most cooperative provinces and the most reluctant, who need their arms twisted to follow suit, in order to help you solve your problems.

Ms. Madeleine Chevalier: First of all, when we set up the steering committee to develop the national strategy, a year and a half or two years ago, we had—and we still have—a representative of the administration of the Council of ministers of Education on the committee. So that person should keep members of the Council of ministers of Education fully abreast of the development of the whole project under the strategy, which is highly integrated.

Mr. Odina Desrochers: Is that person an active participant or an observer?

• (1000)

Ms. Madeleine Chevalier: It's entirely up to him. He can participate.

Mr. Odina Desrochers: Is that person who represents the ministers of Education there to act or just observe?

Ms. Madeleine Chevalier: The person can act. We also have members of our committee from Canadian Heritage and the Privy Council. We did look for partners to avoid working in isolation and ultimately winding up in a situation where everyone would turn us down. So we did look for important voices to ensure that we would ultimately reach open ears.

Mr. Odina Desrochers: How long has that structure been in place?

Ms. Madeleine Chevalier: It's been a year and a half, since the work first began. It started with all of those committee members.

Mr. Odina Desrochers: If I asked you to think back over the past 18 months, would you say you felt that those people were taking action or observing?

Mr. Paul Charbonneau: There is a political will that is...

Mr. Odina Desrochers: It's either there or it isn't.

Mr. Paul Charbonneau: It's not that it isn't there. It's partly our fault. When we took over the school boards, we francophone groups thought that the problem was solved and that we would move on to something else: health, the economy, etc. We were right to do other things, but as francophones, we also felt that after taking over a school board, you had to do something else, because that was settled. We're the ones who didn't necessarily remind ministers of Education that the issue was far from settled and that things weren't working. We're starting to do that. There is some political will, but there are also economic problems in a number of provinces.

For example, in Prince Edward Island, the opening of a kindergarten to grade three school was announced. After grade three, nothing more. They have no money. I try to invite officials from the departments of Education to participate in our meetings. In the smaller provinces, they ask whether I am going to pay their way, but my grant is \$115,000 for my base operating budget.

Mr. Odina Desrochers: Mr. Charbonneau, that means that the political will of the provinces isn't there, if that's how they react. If they were truly aware of the problem, they would have the resources and money to support you.

Mr. Paul Charbonneau: Perhaps, but you have to remember at the same time that English-language school systems are also having some problems.

You asked for a ranking. To go back to something I said earlier, let me talk about New Brunswick. The fact is that in that province, there's a minister of Education who is independent of the English-language education minister. Those people are cooperative. The richer the province, the more cooperative. That's a fact. As for the rest, the message hasn't been repeated often enough over the past 10 years. I think that there's some openness, but it's obvious that the political will eventually have to be reflected in funding; we lack funding. Currently, \$1.5 billion comes from the provinces for our system, and \$90 million comes from the federal government, which also has some responsibilities in this area.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Desrochers.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Chairman, I just have one question to ask.

The Chair: It's Mr. Godin's turn.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I would like to hear the question he wants to ask. I will go after him.

The Chair: You see, Mr. Desrochers, how much we've missed you: everyone is offering you the floor.

Mr. Odina Desrochers: Ah! I am deeply touched.

Mr. Yvon Godin: But I don't miss my turn.

The Chair: You are losing the time that was allocated to you.

Mr. Odina Desrochers: Mr. Chairman, let us carry on, please.

The Chair: Very well.

Mr. Godin.

Mr. Yvon Godin: You were talking earlier about a formula with Mr. D'Amours. I believe that it was in New Brunswick. The concern was whether you were receiving what you should compared with what the anglophones were getting.

Mr. Paul Charbonneau: Right now, that is the case for the councils.

Mr. Yvon Godin: But that is not the formula.

Mr. Paul Charbonneau: That is the formula, and I believe that it is the same in Ontario, except that the provinces receive money for additional costs.

Mr. Yvon Godin: That is what I am trying to understand. You say that the provinces receive money.

Mr. Paul Charbonneau: They receive funding for the additional costs. We get the same amount per capita as the anglophones.

Mr. Yvon Godin: They get this money from the federal government?

Mr. Paul Charbonneau: Yes.

Mr. Yvon Godin: In that case, we have the same problem as Nova Scotia, where the money was allocated to Nova Scotia but was not given to French schools.

Mr. Paul Charbonneau: We have the feeling that that is the case.

Mr. Yvon Godin: You have that feeling. Do you not bring it up with the minister?

Ms. Madeleine Chevalier: That information is not provided.

Mr. Paul Charbonneau: It is not disclosed.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I think that it would be interesting to know and to take note of that. I would like that to be looked into. If the federal government is providing money to help francophone communities, and if the amounts have to be increased because the costs are also going up, but yet this money is not being allocated, I want us to take note of that. I want to know what is going on.

•(1005)

Mr. Paul Charbonneau: Probably that money goes somewhere, as long as it is useful. We know some things because they are visible.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Governments are not perfect.

Mr. Paul Charbonneau: We are aware of certain things, such as a community educational centre or a history book, for example. But there are other things that we cannot see.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Yes, but if you, who are the experts and work in the education system, are not being consulted, I think that there is a problem.

Ms. Madeleine Chevalier: In all honesty, there are certain provinces where ministers communicate with school boards. In some provinces, there is a mechanism for that. However, school boards never know how much money is allocated relative to the total funding in the envelopes. The memorandum of understanding provides for two envelopes.

Mr. Paul Charbonneau: In principle, we know what happens in the case of the action plan. However, not much happens in that case, since it is also on an interim basis.

Mr. Yvon Godin: You are certainly aware of what happened in 1997, when there was a plan to close the Saint-Sauveur and Saint-Simon schools in New Brunswick. There were riots and over reactions. Parents were beaten, children were bitten by RCMP dogs, etc. I remember that. The parents were fighting to keep their schools open when they had 135 students.

We have a school near where we live, in an anglophone community, that has remained open with only five students. Those who want to go to the secondary school go by taxi. Everyone is aware of the difference between the two communities.

Mr. Paul Charbonneau: On the topic of consultation, I can tell you that in the protocol established with the CMEC that concluded in 2002-03, section 8.3 addressed consultation in the following terms:

8.3 Similarly, each provincial/territorial government agrees to consult, when deemed necessary, with interested associations and groups about its educational programs provided for in this Protocol.

It clearly states "when deemed necessary". However, I would say that in most provinces, when it is deemed necessary, it lasts no more than a half an hour. Sometimes we are consulted, but that does not necessarily mean that what we say will be presented to the federal government by the province. However, we are the only homogeneous government that is in a position to make decisions on the requirements of francophones in terms of education.

In our opinion, that section must change. We must be involved, otherwise, francophone departments of education will have to be created throughout the country. That is not what we want. If we were part of the system, we could tell them that they are doing a good job, because it is true that those needs exist. We could subsequently tell the federal government, at the end of the year, what we have spent money on and what the results are.

Mr. Yvon Godin: The school board that had been created in New Brunswick—or that had been destroyed, I should say—no longer even held elections. They were advisory committees, and so on.

How do you see the changes that have occurred since then? Has the situation improved, or has it remained more or less the same?

Ms. Madeleine Chevalier: They have absolutely been in our favour.

Mr. Paul Charbonneau: Five of our school boards are working extremely well.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Poilievre.

[*English*]

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: In the 2003 action plan for official languages the government is intended to increase the proportion of eligible students enrolled in francophone schools from the present 68% to 80% in 10 years. To do so, it intends to increase funding for federal-provincial-territorial agreements in education. It's going to add \$381.5 million for the next five years to the \$929 million in investment that is already provided for.

In your view, if you've had a chance to calculate all of these numbers, will this be sufficient to increase the proportion of eligible students enrolled in francophone schools?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Charbonneau: Under the action plan, \$209 million over five years were earmarked for the francophone minority. The \$381 million amount included immersion. There were a few \$ million at the beginning, and a few more at the end. It represents \$30 million more than what we had before. There were additional agreements on school-board management worth \$179 million, but they were not permanent agreements.

As I said earlier, the school system receives, on average, a total of \$90 million. The rest goes to English as a second language, and in Quebec, to English as a first language, in short, to immersion. In that regard, our share is limited to that amount.

• (1010)

Ms. Madeleine Chevalier: To answer your question, no, it is not enough.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Do you think that the action plan, on the whole, will enable you to meet your objectives as regards French education in your francophone communities?

Ms. Madeleine Chevalier: In my opinion, they are not just our objectives, but also the federal government's objectives. The federal government is talking in fact about increasing francophone enrollment in French schools to 80 per cent by 2013. That is really shooting for the top, even if it is a very laudable objective. The fact remains that to achieve these results, the necessary resources will have to be invested.

In the current context, while we are developing our strategy, we feel that the time is right for achieving this objective: there is synergy among the communities and school systems. However, you could quickly calculate how much it would cost school boards to set up classes for four and five year olds.

I am not in a position to give you the figures, but I am sure that the school boards could provide you with them quickly.

Mr. Paul Charbonneau: The plan is a good start, but to reach 80 per cent, there will clearly not be enough money.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: I have no further questions so Mr. Desrochers can use the rest of my time if he wants.

The Chair: In any case, it's Mr. André's turn.

Do you need more than five minutes?

Mr. Guy André: I can share my time with Odina.

So I'll start. Reading the recommendations of your report, I can see that you say you've had recruitment problems with staff and teachers. You mentioned psychologists and other specialists working at the school. First, I'd like you to say a few words about those specialized services.

Then you pointed out an important problem with student retention. I was reading your action plan and I must say that it's not clear in my mind. What concrete means are you suggesting to increase the recruitment of teachers and students? That's my first question.

As for the children, we've mentioned services for early childhood. As far as I'm concerned, I think that could be an advantage. Fifty per cent of the francophone children we're talking about haven't yet reached the age of five. It would be an advantage to integrate them into the early childhood services. To my mind, that's already a partial solution. As for the teachers and specialists, you're suggesting a few things in Focus 3, but I don't see anything concrete there.

To conclude, you quickly mentioned that educating a francophone minority child in French costs more than educating the child in an English school. What is the difference? Have you evaluated the cost in terms of percentage or figures, for example, \$10,000 for one and \$11,000 for the other?

Ms. Madeleine Chevalier: I know that those costs have been calculated in Ontario. It was done for all the francophone school boards just to be able to respond to the needs that they must respond to at the present time. Among other things, for administrative support services and for all the accountability items that are set up with the governments—those things also have their good side—you need staff. Producing reports on students with problems requires time and staff. It's very long. Now, the francophone school boards are smaller than the school boards of the majority and on top of that they have a ratio they must meet concerning the number of students and the size of the administration.

Among other things, that means they have far less staff to meet the requirements which are the same as the ones for the schools of the majority. The whole aspect of early childhood, that is the four and five years old, must also be considered. Besides, as translated programs do not meet the needs of our client base, you have to add in development costs for all programs.

• (1015)

Mr. Guy André: Has that been counted in one way or another?

Mr. Paul Charbonneau: There is no general rule, but there are some formulas. For example, we're developing one in Manitoba. To do this, we're using the model of a school board called Frontier that's located over a huge territory. In Saskatchewan, the way to count those things isn't the same as in Ontario. We don't have any choice: we have to look at the context. In some cases, there is only one school board and very few students for the whole province whereas in others, the province has a dozen school boards and half the young people in that area. However, we can engage in a calculation for each one of those situations.

As for the concrete means we're using for staffing, I must point out that at the present time the situation is as follows: we are recruiting a fairly large number of people, but very few of them stay on. We absolutely must find mechanisms that will allow us to prepare those people to live in the areas they're going to be sent to. As I was saying before, someone who leaves Moncton and winds up in Souris, on Prince Edward Island, winds up in a far different world, even though Acadians do share all manner of common values. We have to make sure that people who settle in our communities know what to expect. Besides, our classrooms are often small and include several grades. In some cases, the children in kindergarden don't all have the same capacities in terms of understanding the language. We also have to train the newcomers in that respect. As the school boards are all acting independently, they have problems achieving that goal.

So we would actually have to develop programs to prepare teachers for the pedagogy involved, the community environment and the parental approach. Because the teachers are dealing with exogamous parents, the first thing they have to do is learn a bit of English. Then, for our part, we should teach them techniques that would allow them to help the children when they go back home.

In short, there are all kinds of things of that nature that have to be done. At the outset, 5 per cent of teachers leave teaching during the first five years. If we discourage them by sending them out into the unknown, even more of them will leave. So that's the kind of program we must set up.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Simard.

Hon. Raymond Simard (Saint Boniface, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Godin, thank you for your kindness.

Welcome, Ms. Chevalier and Mr. Charbonneau. I have two questions. Indeed, the Dion Plan provides for rather major investments in education but we're also talking about accountability and measurable results.

Are you a creation of the provinces?

Mr. Paul Charbonneau: In a way, yes.

Hon. Raymond Simard: It would seem to me that for the provinces to attain their objectives, they should involve you in that decision. What is the connection between the provinces and your boards? Would you want a role that went beyond that, such as to be equal partners with the provinces and federal government, for example?

Ms. Madeleine Chevalier: We want more than to be consulted, we want to participate in all those decisions. The education experts are the school boards. When I say "we", I don't mean that the FNCSF wants to be sitting at the bargaining table for each and every agreement with the provinces. However, we would like each school board or group of school of boards depending on the province, to establish that privileged link between the Department of Education and the school systems, because the latter are the ones who have to deliver the finished product. So it's absolutely essential and crucial that they be able to speak.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Do the provinces automatically consult you or communicate with you to deliver the product to the francophones?

Ms. Madeleine Chevalier: Some provinces, yes, but not all of them.

Mr. Paul Charbonneau: Not doing so is anticonstitutional.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Yes, so there are the two sides.

You also mentioned the national strategy. I don't know if I understood you correctly, but you mentioned that all the groups involved are developing a national strategy. Of course, there is also a matter of timing. We were told that these special envelopes could be signed in a matter of days.

Does that have any impact? Should we wait for that national strategy before signing agreements with the provinces?

• (1020)

Mr. Paul Charbonneau: No. We've been waiting too long already. However, I think that could serve as a guideline when negotiations are undertaken with the provinces. I think that if the plan comes from all the francophone and Acadian stakeholders in the field of education, it will also have to become the plan of the provinces and the federal government. We think that's how we can accomplish what has been set out in the Action Plan for Official Languages.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Do you think you should play a role, at the outset, with the federal government, to establish what results or things should be measured, for example? Has the federal government consulted you?

Mr. Paul Charbonneau: With Heritage Canada, the problem is that historically, it negotiates with the provinces. Based on the current understanding, even though that is also in the federal jurisdiction, it's a delicate manner. Actually, I must tell you that to date we have met three Heritage Canada ministers three times each and the answer was always no.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We'll wind this up quickly.

Mr. Godin.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I think we've had a good overview of the questions and concerns that you share with Canada's francophone minority regions. I really believe in the day care program we're working on now. I think that's part of the plan. If not, we're missing the boat while it's still tied up to the wharf. They'll be putting a monkey wrench in the works if... We should really start with the day a child is born. That should also be part of our recommendations.

Earlier, a Conservative colleague said that the responsibility of the francophone schools should be a national responsibility. That's not what you were suggesting. You continue to say that under the Constitution, it is a provincial area but that, within that, both official languages must be respected. Now, the way to do that is to give the training and the education to the people who need it. We need tools, because to do it in French costs more money. For example, when you write a letter in French, it's a little longer than in English. We learn verbs that they don't have to learn.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Paul Charbonneau: That's still not a reason for the federal government not to get involved in that jurisdiction, because it is also responsible for that aspect of it in the name of linguistic duality.

Mr. Yvon Godin: It's the extra that is needed to make sure that when the federal government gives money to the provinces, they are actually held to respecting certain standards.

Ms. Madeleine Chevalier: That's it.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Thank you for taking the time to come and meet us and answer all of our questions.

This part of the meeting is now ended.

We will continue our work in camera for a couple of minutes.

Thank you very much.

[Proceedings continue in camera.]

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