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Mr. Steven Blaney

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• (0905)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC)): Welcome to the 15th meeting of the Standing Committee on Official Languages. We are continuing our study on the federal government's support for post-secondary institutions and their efforts in promoting bilingualism in Canada. This morning's meeting is our third to last before we move to the drafting of our report following witness testimony.

It is our pleasure to welcome representatives from Canadian Parents for French.

[English]

They are represented by the president, Mr. David Brennick.

Welcome to our committee, Mr. Brennick.

The executive director, Mr. James Shea, is also with us. Welcome to our committee.

[Translation]

It is also our pleasure to welcome Ms. Silvia Faitelson-Weiser, Professor at the Department of Languages, Linguistics and Translation of Laval University. Welcome to the committee.

Without further ado, I would invite Mr. Brennick to make his presentation. Further to that, parliamentarians may ask him questions. You have the floor.

[English]

Mr. David Brennick (President, National Board of Directors, Canadian Parents for French): Good morning, and thank you for inviting Canadian Parents for French to participate in the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

I have been an active advocate for French second-language education throughout my professional career, and now as CPF's sitting president I'm honoured to stand here before this distinguished panel to give a voice to the many students hoping to commence or continue French education in their post-secondary academic careers.

CPF will provide this committee with an objective, non-partisan perspective on the realm of post-secondary French second-language education in Canada. Our research initiatives of particular relevance to this brief are surveys of over 500 undergraduates who provided retrospective information about their secondary and post-secondary FSL experiences; FSL teacher shortage and guidance counsellor surveys; and an inventory of post-secondary opportunities and

supports for anglophone students to study in their second official language.

CPF currently sits on a steering committee for a joint post-secondary initiative led by the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages and the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada.

What is the situation, from our view? Over 70% of students in Canada are enrolled in post-secondary programs, but despite the fact that young people are more supportive of linguistic duality and bilingualism than older generations, and despite the fact that they recognize the academic and employment benefits of official-language bilingualism, secondary and post-secondary French second-language programs are characterized by low enrolment and retention.

To resolve this situation, we feel it is necessary for the Government of Canada to put in place measures to increase the proportion of students who complete high school core French and French immersion programs, to increase the number of opportunities to continue studying in French at the post-secondary level.

We advance a number of notions and suggestions for enhancing recruitment and retention in high school French second-language programs. First is to ensure equitable access to core and immersion programs—and the operative word here is equitable. The increasingly multicultural Canadian population, and in particular the growing immigrant population, provide opportunities for the government to implement strategies that capitalize on the strong support for and acceptance of multilingualism that is characteristic of this population. Currently, no federal or provincial policies explicitly ensure allophone students access to French second-language education. Such gaps in policy have led to the possible exclusion of allophone students from French second-language studies and language planning.

Federal government policies and practices should ensure that English second-language graduates are expected and encouraged to enrol in French second-language programs; ensure that multiple entry points to French second-language immersion programs are established and maintained to accommodate the FSL goals of English second-language graduates without prior French experience; and revise official-language acquisition planning to include allophone students.

Extending French immersion programming to students with a wide range of academic abilities is important. High school French immersion programming is essentially delivered primarily via advanced-level courses geared to university-bound students, despite the fact that general-level students will enter service sector jobs in greater numbers. While only 13% of Canadians hold university degrees, a full 30% hold post-secondary diplomas or certificates granted by community colleges.

Students of lesser academic ability and those requiring remedial or special education supports are often counselled out of immersion programs because few school districts provide special education support services for immersion students. This is particularly unfortunate because we know that research shows us, tells us, that these students are not further handicapped in immersion programs. They do as well in immersion as they do in the English stream, and if they choose immersion, they have the added employment advantage of bilingualism.

With this backdrop, the Government of Canada, in our view, should extend immersion programming to general-level programs and courses in secondary schools; ensure that early French immersion programming, which is unique in its suitability for the widest range of student abilities, is maintained, supported, and expanded in all jurisdictions; fund longitudinal research studies to identify the types of learning disabilities, if any, that would make students poor candidates for immersion programs; and finally, ensure that education specialist support services are available to students in French immersion.

In terms of providing factual information about the benefits of bilingualism and French second-language education, in our work and in the studies that we have commissioned, we find that students and parents often lack sufficient information to make informed decisions about French second-language education. Many assume that French immersion in elementary school is enough to master the language, while others remain convinced that high school students cannot achieve the level of French proficiency required to work or to continue French second-language studies at the post-secondary level.

The federal government should, in our view, establish national comparable standards of French proficiency outcomes for graduates from various elementary and secondary French second-language programs to assist parents and students in making informed program choices and to ensure that high school graduates are aware of their French abilities; develop and fund effective promotional materials to encourage youth in Canada to turn their support for bilingualism into action; ensure that guidance counsellors and teachers are informed of post-secondary opportunities and supports; fund promotional campaigns informing students of post-secondary opportunities and emphasizing the academic and employment benefits of bilingualism at a time when, in our view, there is a great need, as there will be in the foreseeable future; and finally, fund the research and development of an inventory describing the number and nature of bilingual job opportunities in Canada to encourage greater enrolment in elementary, secondary, and post-secondary French second-language programs and to assist students, guidance counsellors, and post-secondary institutions to locate appropriate job opportunities for students entering the workforce.

In terms of enhancing enrolment and program quality by ensuring an adequate supply of qualified French second-language teachers, we know that shortages of teachers with appropriate pedagogical, French language, and discipline or subject qualifications continue to plague French second-language programs across the country. Government and post-secondary institutions should continue current promotional efforts to recruit and retain qualified French second-language teachers in order to maintain and increase the availability of high school French second-language programs, including core French, integrated French, late French immersion, early French immersion, and any of the variants.

In terms of developing and implementing a national strategy to increase the number of post-secondary institutions offering opportunities for students to study in their second official language, we offer the comments that follow.

Canada is one of the few highly industrialized countries without a national strategy for post-secondary education. Indeed, we are currently unable to determine post-secondary enrolment rates for French immersion graduates within Canada, and reports of the testing done by the international program for international student assessment, or PISA, do not distinguish immersion student outcomes from those of English and French first-language programs.

● (0910)

We strongly encourage the Government of Canada to act on findings and adopt recommendations from a joint post-secondary initiative by the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages and the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, in order to develop and implement a strategy to provide more post-secondary opportunities for students in Canada to study in their second official language.

Such a strategy should do the following: encourage and support the development of a coalition of post-secondary institutions tasked with coordinating pan-Canadian efforts; gather French second-language educational data at the elementary, secondary, and post-secondary levels to inform national and post-secondary language planning; establish more university courses and programs taught in French beyond French language and literature courses, courses that would provide appropriate supports for anglophone students studying in their second language; encourage and assist francophone community colleges to recruit and support students studying French as their second official language; develop and implement policies to allow anglophone community colleges to offer programs taught in French; implement lifelong French second-language learning opportunities that include second-language acquisition, maintenance, and enhancement.

Language training should be available at little or no cost.

In terms of recruiting and retaining students by enhancing the relevance and appeal of French-language courses and programs for anglophone students, we suggest the provision of a wide range of courses and programs related to students' diverse fields of study, not just language and literature options. We also suggest adopting immersion pedagogical methods and building on the research that we know is associated with French second-language teaching and learning, which are associated with higher proficiency levels than the more traditional foreign-language approach. Those of us involved in French second-language teaching and learning know that the use of the "foreign" connotes a certain approach to language teaching and learning, one that might be based on grammar and translation.

We would suggest accommodating the wide range of French-language proficiency levels presented by core and immersion graduates. We would suggest the provision of academic and social supports to anglophone students studying in their second official language, as identified by a CPF survey of over 500 undergraduates that I referenced earlier.

Examples of such supports are subject-based language tutorials and organized opportunities for students to interact with native French-speaking Canadians. We would also suggest very strongly the implementation of the common European framework of reference for languages to ensure national proficiency standards and to provide marketable second-language accreditation for post-secondary graduates seeking employment.

With respect to French second-language teacher recruitment and retention, we offer the following suggestions: develop and implement pan-Canadian standards for teacher education and teacher qualifications; encourage and assist the Council of Ministers of Education to implement pan-Canadian teacher mobility agreements, similar to the one recently developed by Alberta and British Columbia; and finally, conduct promotional campaigns to encourage high school graduates to consider French second-language teaching careers.

●(0915)

In conclusion, by ensuring equitable access to French second-language programs for all students in Canada; by enhancing enrolment and retention in high school French second-language programs; by reassuring parents, students, and teachers of the

second-language abilities of FSL graduates; and by establishing more post-secondary opportunities for French second-language graduates to study in French, the Government of Canada, in our view, will be well placed to enhance support for linguistic duality and to meet both public service and labour force demands for bilingual staff.

Thank you for affording Canadian Parents for French the opportunity to contribute to your deliberations today.

Thank you. Merci.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Brennick.

I let you extend your time a little. You have brought us more than 25 recommendations this morning that are aimed at the core of our study, so the members will have the opportunity to ask some questions.

[*Translation*]

First of all, I would like to hear from the representative from Laval University, Ms. Weiser.

Ms. Silvia Faitelson-Weiser (Professor, Department of Languages, Linguistics and Translation, Laval University): Thank you very much.

●(0920)

[*English*]

As you will probably hear by my accent, neither French nor English is my mother tongue. As soon as I start speaking you will realize that my mother tongue is Spanish, but I will address you in French, since there is terminology involved. That is easier for us right now.

[*Translation*]

On behalf of the rector of our university, Mr. Denis Brière, I thank the committee for welcoming Laval University's testimony.

I was introduced as a professor in the Department of Languages, Linguistics and Translation, which is true, but have no fear, I will not be making a purely academic presentation, devoid of pragmatism. I have been sent to appear before your committee because up until a month ago I had been the Director, for eight years, of the School of Languages at Laval University.

Allow me to give you some history in terms of language teaching at Laval University. It does relate somewhat to Mr. Brennick's presentation; Mr. Brennick is correct. In fact, the School of Languages at Laval University is a partner of—

An honourable member: Canadian Parents for French.

Ms. Silvia Faitelson-Weiser: Yes.

Language training at Laval University, oddly enough, began in 1937 with French-language training for Americans. There was the Junior Year Abroad program which was quite trendy at the time. Quickly we steered away from the traditional model criticized by students today and which is no longer being used at Laval University, at least in general, and which was the strictly literature and linguistics model.

As of the 1940s the university developed a host of new and modern methods eventually leading to the use of the communicative method. Today they apply to e-learning courses, to new and not-so-new IT methods and to communications.

In the late 1980s, the university felt compelled to develop a policy on training in an era of globalization. Obviously, Laval University being a francophone university in a francophone environment, it felt it had to develop very advanced training in English, due to market requirements. In Quebec City, as you know, the second language is English. The university had to rise up to the challenge of ensuring its students were as bilingual as possible.

However, being a francophone university, Laval's challenge was to get students to learn English. So, through the Language School, it put ESL and FSL training on parallel tracks.

Contrary to what may have been said, the challenge for us is to see how we can really improve English-language skills among our student population.

At the same time, we continue to welcome students from all over the world to come and learn French. Over the last few years we have noticed some changes, mainly with respect to Canadians. Canadian students only come to Laval in the summertime, through the Explore program. It is the only government assistance we receive for bilingualism.

Moreover, with respect to Explore, we have noted this year that there has been a drop in the number of scholarships, unfortunately. Sometimes we do not manage to reach our quota. In fact in the summertime, our students, and I think this is a generalized trend in Canada, prefer to or need to work. And spending five weeks doing nothing but learning the other language or visiting another province is a problem for them.

All provinces now have Explore and there are still thousands of students travelling through this program, which must certainly improve interprovincial communications. Perhaps it would be advisable to find other ways to encourage students to practise, learn and improve their knowledge of a second language.

●(0925)

At the university we are developing, among other things, e-learning courses within microprograms. Now, we believe that we could probably get students to acquire three skills, certainly at a distance, such as oral comprehension, writing comprehension and writing practice.

With respect to oral practice, perhaps they could take short immersion programs. As we have seen, many students cannot travel, they cannot or they do not want to. Regardless, they are not prepared to travel, not even for the five weeks duration of the Explore program.

We are therefore looking into developing shorter training courses, either during reading weeks, or two-week courses. They could certainly help improve students' knowledge and keep it up to date.

To do this there will need to be far clearer agreements between universities on recognition of credits. We deal with some fairly traditional universities that are unwilling to recognize credits

acquired by students for courses other than literature courses. That is the traditional approach much criticized by students, but there is nothing that we can do about. At times we have to improperly classify our students, otherwise the credits we award them are not recognized by other universities.

I agree with Mr. Brennick: there is probably a dearth of standards in Canada today. We all discuss bilingualism, and perhaps it is clear for everyone what is meant by bilingualism in each institution. However, I am not so sure there is a pragmatic and applicable definition of the term.

To me, pragmatic and applicable would involve obtaining a given score on a given test, for instance. I do not want to oversimplify things, but the question we ask is whether young people know what is expected of them when we refer to bilingualism. What are they expected to do? Speak, understand, and say a few words, read?

We believe that the federal government could greatly contribute to a solution by helping universities to come up with a pragmatic accessible and coordinated definition of the required degree of bilingualism, perhaps by field of expertise or for given positions. We have looked for a definition. If one does exist we have not seen it.

Universities all have goodwill and they are all convinced that what they do is of the utmost top calibre, that they do better work than all the other universities. Perhaps we all need somebody to help us conclude that our best is equivalent to that of others, and help us come to some agreement on the way to proceed. I think the government is in a position to do that.

Our university is quite pleased to address some of the issues raised and to say that we regularly offer training courses each summer for FSL teachers.

However, as I have stated, aside from the Explore Scholarships, Canadian students are no longer coming to Laval University to learn French. Over the course of the year we have three, four or perhaps five Canadian students. Are they going to France? Obviously, when there were year-long scholarships, we used to get 300, 400 or 500 students over the fall and winter sessions. There is no longer any support, so Canadian students no longer really come to Quebec City to learn French.

●(0930)

I think I have shared the gist of my notes with you. Obviously, we believe the government could support teacher training courses and could perhaps implement a program of short-term summer courses for students wanting to maintain their level of bilingualism.

I thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Faitelson-Weiser. It would be interesting to know whether this drop in attendance is due to a drop in interest in the French language on the part of anglophones.

Mr. Rodriguez.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome to you all and thank you for being here.

Mr. Brennick, according to the Statistics Canada the proportion of young bilingual people has significantly decreased over the last ten years. To what do you attribute this drop?

Mr. David Brennick: I can answer in French or English, as you wish.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: In Spanish as well, if you like...

Mr. David Brennick: Our young people have so many choices these days. We believe that when we focus on the cultural and social aspect of the issue and young people see that they have an opportunity to gain experience in a different context, it is enriching to them, they gain a great deal.

Also, as stated by Ms. Faitelson-Weiser, there is an interest in short-term courses. This does not only apply to older individuals needing French for work purposes, but also to young people. They are used to short-term experiences. We have one week summer camps that exist throughout the country, for instance. These courses give young people an opportunity to share their experiences and encourage others do the same.

There are so many choices in school! The people we know working in schools tell us that in public high schools, students have to choose between being in the band and math courses. These days they are treated like royalty, but they do have to choose. It does not mean they do not want to do certain things, but they do have to make a choice. If they don't experience learning a second language in high school, what will they do at the post-secondary level?

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Are young people outside of Quebec not interested in French, or has there been a drop in interest?

Ms. Silvia Faitelson-Weiser: I think statistics must be interpreted. Are there fewer young people that are bilingual or are there fewer young people speaking English and French?

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: I would say speaking English and French, the two official languages.

Ms. Silvia Faitelson-Weiser: French is no longer the second language in North America. There is nothing we can do about that; Spanish has replaced it. What can I say?

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: [The Member speaks Spanish.]

Ms. Silvia Faitelson-Weiser: Young people know this. My grandchildren living in Toronto must invest in learning a second language. Well, if there is no specific motivation to learn French, they will choose, if they are realistic, to learn Spanish. And if they are forward thinking, they will choose Japanese, Chinese or Arabic. We have seen this clearly at Laval University; there is an increase in the numbers for other languages.

• (0935)

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: When we refer to bilingualism in our committee, we refer to official languages. Is there a link between bilingualism and access to jobs or better jobs? In Canada, is fluency in both official languages rewarded or not?

Ms. Silvia Faitelson-Weiser: In my opinion, it is unclear. Francophones learn English more easily, not because English is easier to learn, but because there is no other choice. It is the universal language of communications. Have anglophones understood that

they need to learn French? There is no clear policy on that. What must they be able to say in French? Is it enough to say "Bonjour, comment ça va?" Is it clear one needs to be bilingual to enter the public service? If so, why is it that whenever I am outside of Quebec and I go to a federal government office, I have to apologize for my accent and speak English? They apologize for not being able to speak French.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Rodriguez.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: You are very welcome, Mr. Blaney.

The Chair: I was going to urge you to continue in one of our two official languages. In so doing, you would be indulgent towards our interpreters and would not reveal my ignorance of this third language.

Mr. Nadeau, you have the floor, in English or in French please.

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Thank you very much, Mr. Blaney.

Welcome to our guests.

First of all, I would like to point out that there is a Franco-Ontarian fund, the Jean-Robert-Gauthier Fund, and there is in this context a yearly literary essay competition. This year, a Laval University student, Mr. Melkevik, won the prize. In his essay, published last April 21 in *Le Droit*, he writes something I would subscribe to. It applies to you all. He says that the state must grant special consideration to francophone minorities: francophone communities outside Quebec must be protected, encouraged and supported.

I personally come from Ontario. I was born in Hawkesbury. I worked for a long time and with great interest among French-speaking communities in a minority setting in Canada. One of the positions I held involved Franco-Saskatchewanian school management. It was a very rewarding experience. We all know that in 1931, the Conservative government in Saskatchewan abolished French-language schools. It was not until 1995 that they were allowed to reopen. In 1968, immersion schools were created in the province, but there had not yet been talk of creating schools where French was the first language of instruction.

I have the following question for Canadian Parents for French. I would like it to be perceived as a possible solution and not so much as an attack or condemnation. I'm giving you the example of Saskatchewan because of the French fact and because your activities cover the entire country. Of the 10,000 students who could be registered in French-language schools in Saskatchewan, only 1,000 are. The other 9,000 mainly go to English-language schools or immersion schools.

The problem we had at the time and which remains, was to convince people in immersion schools to redirect FL1 students, in other words those who speak French as a mother tongue, to schools where French was the primary language rather than keep them in immersion schools. We believe, and I'm going to say a bad word now, that that amounts to total assimilation, given that these young people end up serving as models for young anglophones learning French. I do not object to anglophones learning French, but that should not happen on the backs of French-Canadian or minority French-Canadian communities.

I know that you have established a partnership with the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne, and that is very good. Partnerships lead to solutions. I would like to know whether you, at Canadian Parents for French, are prepared to tell people within provincial school boards to redirect these students towards schools where French is the first language of instruction rather than to keep them in their own school boards despite the fact that one student represents \$5,400 in income? Are you prepared to do that much to support the French fact?

• (0940)

Mr. David Brennick: Mr. Nadeau, I experienced that myself in Nova Scotia, where I come from. Before the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial was established, we were the ones, we whose mother tongue... I work for a school board that brought a case before the Supreme Court regarding section 23 of the Canadian Charter of rights and freedoms. I am well aware of this phenomenon.

I would like to point out that in our part of the province, each year we lose more than 700 or 800 students. But the number of students at the Centre scolaire Étoile de l'Acadie, which is the school in our region that teaches children whose mother tongue is French, continues to increase because we work in the children's mother tongue, their first language. Our goal is not to encourage families to send their children to our schools. We respect the decision made by the families, but what is really important is that people be well-informed. Material designed to teach children in their mother tongue, in their first language, is not identical to material designed to teach children a second language. There is a big difference between the two. Many of my friends were assimilated and lost their French, their maternal tongue. That is the tragic story of Acadians in our part of the country.

We must provide clear information, but all the same, the decisions are made by the family. We have always said that the information is correct, that it's good information.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Nadeau. You will be able to continue later on.

Mr. Godin.

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

Thank you, Mr. Brennick. It will be easier for me to address my remarks to Ms. Faitelson-Weiser. I am pleased to see you here with us today.

You say that the families are the ones who should make the decisions, and I agree with you on that point, but if the tools they use to make the right decision are not sufficient, we have a problem.

We toured the country, and we went everywhere, from Newfoundland to Vancouver. In some French-speaking communities, there was no French day care centre. So the children went to an English-speaking day care, and finally wound up in an English school. Thanks to the new program and the new action plan established in 2002, money was available to help the communities in this regard. And so, day care centres were established within the schools. Parents could send their children to a French day care and then a French school.

As we have seen in New Brunswick, anglophones want their children to go to a French immersion school at a very young age. The minister wanted to send them to French immersion in grade 5. That was the first time I saw 350 anglophones demonstrate in the street because they wanted to speak French. You remember this, it happened last year.

To get back to the topic of our study, earlier you were saying that people choose English, French or Spanish, depending on their job and what is best for them. The federal government must send a message to the provinces and the universities, who represent some of the biggest employers in the country. The government must tell them that they must offer services in both languages since we are living in a bilingual country.

With Service Canada, people can go work everywhere and do not have to restrict themselves to one particular place. Someone can find a job just as easily in Alberta or Nova Scotia as in Toronto. The government must send a clear message and help the communities so that they can send the university professors... The government must clearly state that the employer wants to hire certain people and should start preparing them for these jobs. As Mr. Shea said, we must start preparing people in the field so that they can hold these jobs. It is not an insult to be told that you need to learn two or three languages. We have to put an end to this silliness.

I would like to hear your opinion.

• (0945)

Ms. Silvia Faitelson-Weiser: I'm convinced that if we really do want Canada's anglophones to keep French as a second language, Canadian bilingualism has to be valued. That may be the case, but it is no longer obvious.

Our young people are turning their backs on French. We have international programs because our young people want to learn other languages. They have understood that globalization means knowing other languages. What they do not readily understand, however, is that they need to learn French. Why should they learn French when there are so many other languages that I listed earlier?

Mr. Yvon Godin: Why should they learn French when the Government of Canada does not respect this requirement itself?

Ms. Silvia Faitelson-Weiser: I agree, but I am not the one that...

Mr. Yvon Godin: Do you agree with me?

Ms. Silvia Faitelson-Weiser: Yes, but I think...

Mr. Yvon Godin: Our meeting is being recorded and a report will be produced.

Ms. Silvia Faitelson-Weiser: The policy must be clear and people need to be well informed. Our young people need tangible things, and I am not talking about money alone. They need to know what is expected of them. It is not enough to tell them that they have to be bilingual, we need to be much more precise.

Mr. Yvon Godin: It is the same thing in British Columbia. We met with representatives from the organization Canadian Parents for French on several occasions and they told us that there was a problem with the number of teachers. In British Columbia, young people sign up to learn French, but there are not enough teachers.

By the way, the Shippagan campus at the University of Moncton, in New Brunswick, provides emerging courses as well.

Mr. David Brennick: There are still not enough properly trained bilingual teachers. I have been in the educational field for a long time. As regards the short-term programs that Ms. Faitelson-Weiser referred to earlier, our centre has had an agreement or an arrangement with the Collège de Jonquière linguistic centre for many years now. We have done this for two reasons. First of all, we can provide a three-week training session to improve the pedagogical and socio-cultural language training of our teachers. Since they work all year long, they can take this three-week course in the summer. We have benefited from this training a great deal, as have our teachers and students, which is essential for us.

We have to enhance the value of French. We are all speaking from our personal experience. My daughter took advantage of the program subsidized by the Government of Canada. She worked as a caregiver in the Montreal region for a summer. She worked with young people. A Quebec girl came to our region and held a similar job and lived at my home. These two young people had this experience thanks to the government's subsidy. This experience has enriched their personal development. But aside from this development, they improved their level of language. This is the type of thing that strengthens the acquisition of a language and makes the experience real and tangible.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Brennick.

Thank you, Mr. Godin.

Ms. Silvia Faitelson-Weiser: As I already said, we provide a follow-up course. Normally we have 70 students every month in July. If we have three or four Canadians, that is a lot. The remainder are foreign teachers who want to improve themselves.

The Chair: Very well. Thank you.

I will now give the floor to Ms. Shelly Glover.

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Saint Boniface, CPC): Good morning, and thank you for being here today. I have a number of questions I would like to ask. Since I have only a few minutes, I will start by telling you my story.

I was a student in the immersion program. I now have five children, and some of them were in immersion as well. When I was at school, there were certain rules, and we were required to speak French in the halls. You talk about standards for acceptance at the post-secondary level, but at one point, Canadian Parents for French decided that the program was too demanding. It was decided that students were not required to speak French all the time. Some of the rules were abolished.

Today, my children have a great deal of trouble speaking French, because they had no opportunity to practise. I would like to know whether we could get your support before the students graduate. Before establishing standards for high school, we need your support to help students from K to 12. They have to practise their French.

You talked about scholarships. This is the reason Canadians are no longer learning French. In my opinion, our children have no confidence and do not want to continue their education in French. Last week, I spoke to some grade 11 and 12 immersion students. They told me that they were in immersion because their parents put

them there. They also said that they did not like French, but that it "looks good on my résumé". And they could not even say that in French! Do you think this is because of a lack of scholarships, or because these students do not have the confidence they need to take high school courses in French? Do we have your support? Could we ask you to make a change and to put back the rules that you abolished. Do you think this has an impact on students?

● (0950)

Mr. David Brennick: If I understand your question correctly, you would like us to support the introduction of rules by schools that would require students to speak French in the halls.

Based on my experience, there has always been a battle about this in the schools. At some point, people become exhausted. Should we become language cops? I prefer to encourage young people and to highlight the value of learning a second language. We have to find a middle ground. The same goes for our own children at home. Sometimes we make good decisions, and sometimes we make bad decisions. It is true that it is crucial that young people have a chance to practise and use French. That is why I encourage training programs, trips and exchanges.

However, in our area, we have noticed that it has become difficult to promote exchanges these days. We have to be realistic, we have to look at the demographics and see who these young people are. They are no longer the same as they were 20 years ago. That is why it becomes a real challenge when you ask us what works, what can be done and what we can do. I concede that this is very important. We have to show sensitivity, because we do not want to become the language police either. For that, there is the Office québécois de la langue française.

Ms. Silvia Faitelson-Weiser: I would say that in my opinion, we cannot reduce this to a question of confidence. There will always be students who are short on confidence until they have to speak French, when they are in a francophone environment and have to buy something in the grocery store, for example. Generally speaking, our young people are not more or less confident than they were in the past. It is a question of motivation. I was talking about scholarships. This is an incentive that could compensate for the importance of other languages.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: I talked to these students and asked them why they were not speaking French. They said clearly that they were embarrassed, because their French was not very good.

● (0955)

[English]

I want to really stress the fact that I think it is more important to practise your French than to just take courses and study how the French language works.

Again, Canadian Parents for French were the ones who changed my program. We really need your support to bring this back.

I do like the comments you made about standards, but I wonder if you believe the standards should also be put at the earlier stages. Because we all recognize that at the base, at the very beginning, there is a problem, because by the time they get to grade 12 it looks like we've already missed the boat.

Ms. Silvia Faitelson-Weiser: I would be all for standards being put at the earlier levels, but the problem you would encounter is that not all the students start studying at the same age. There is a difference in standards for somebody who started speaking French—or English, let's say—at home. I think standards should apply to English too.

If there are requirements for English-speaking people in French, there should be requirements for French-speaking people in English.

So it's very hard to establish. There could be agreements between elementary schools, let's say, but in the end, we are talking about working for the government. So if the government is serious that everybody has to be bilingual, to what level do they have to get?

[Translation]

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

We will now begin the second round with Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours.

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

I would like to thank our witnesses for being here this morning.

A little earlier, you touched on the issue of languages. With respect to what my colleague opposite, Ms. Glover, was saying, I think perhaps society as a whole has to make a decision about French. I live in northern New Brunswick, in a community that is 98% francophone. I took classes in English at the polyvalente, and the teacher—and I will not give any more detail so as to avoid targeting anyone—talked to us in French. And yet it was an English course. That is the opposite of what usually happens. At some point, people have to decide whether they want to be unilingual or bilingual. The question applies equally to francophones and anglophones regarding the other language. It is ironic to realize that this English course was being taught in French. How do you learn English in a community that is 98% francophone, and where the few anglophones living there, most from birth, all speak French in the community. That makes things even more difficult.

You raised the issue of the two languages, Ms. Faitelson-Weiser. The problem does not affect the public service only: it is everyone. Businesses or other private companies have no obligations. Often only one language is used, and that is the one spoken in the community. Everywhere else, or at least in most other countries, people do not mind learning three, four or sometimes more languages. Elsewhere, this seems totally natural, yet here in Canada it is seen as a burden. As you mentioned, a requirement could be introduced forcing people who want jobs with the federal government to be bilingual at the outset. However, that would not fix the problem regarding private companies.

Does Canadian society have a problem in this regard? Let us take the example of my English classes being taught in French. The same thing happens in anglophone communities, where it is not easy to speak French. Why should people not be learning three or four languages? As my colleague demonstrated earlier, he knows at least three languages. Of course, I do not know how well he was doing, because I could not understand a word he was saying.

Ms. Silvia Faitelson-Weiser: I will give him a test later.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Right.

Have we developed a problem as a society in Canada by limiting ourselves, by failing to go further?

Ms. Silvia Faitelson-Weiser: I think you are generalizing a little too much when you say that everywhere else, people speak several languages. I am from Latin America, and there, people usually speak three languages: Spanish, Spanish and Spanish. It is true, however, that in recent years, people are starting to learn English, because it has become so important. We probably do have a problem as a society, because we cannot make up our minds whether or not we are bilingual.

That said, English has dual status in the world today. It has become the *lingua franca*. In the past, French had this status as the language of diplomacy. German was the language of the sciences. There was even a time when Latin and Spanish enjoyed this type of status. Today, English has become the international language of communication. Given that, there is no doubt that anglophones throughout the world feel much less need to learn another language. The anglophones of Canada are part of the world community of anglophones.

However, for at least 15 years, our young people have known that they have to learn another language. However, that other language is not necessarily French. It is incorrect to say that there are no problems elsewhere in the world. Switzerland and other European countries are the exceptions, because the communities where different languages are spoken are much closer together there than they are in North America. In North America, everyone speaks English.

• (1000)

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Thank you very much.

I would like leave some time for Mr. Brennick, who would like to respond as well.

[English]

Mr. David Brennick: In celebration of 40 years of official bilingualism, I did a number of radio interviews. What was very encouraging to me, in the comments shared, was that people were very much at ease with French or English. A number of individuals made comments to me like, "They size me up. If they think I'm English they address me in English. If they're wrong they just switch to French."

I think over the last four years there has been a depoliticization of linguistic issues. People are no longer caught up in the same fervour around language and politicizing it. They really look at it as a tool. I see it with my own children, in their ability to go from one to the other with no fear.

Part of my day job is responsibility for international students—we have many Spanish-speaking students—and sensitizing our own students to the fact that this is a great and wonderful world where people are comfortable, regardless of the language. That's part of the changing demographic of our country and part of the new reality—coming like this with respect to languages, a second language.

[Translation]

The Chair: Perhaps we could continue our work in Spanish a little later, for those interested in doing so.

Mr. Nadeau.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Thank you, Mr. Blaney.

I would like to conclude the discussion we started earlier, Mr. Brennick. It was most interesting. You send in information to distinguish between students whose mother tongue and spoken language are French, and those for whom French is a second language. In the first case, students go to a school where the language and culture are French, and those in the second group go to immersion. Do you send this information to school boards or school divisions? That is really where the decisions are made.

Mr. David Brennick: In my experience, this information is shared by the school boards. I can only speak from my personal experience in Nova Scotia.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: For some time now, Ms. Faitelson-Weiser, the committee has been discussing an interesting issue. We would like to know why post-secondary institutions cannot train more graduates who can speak French and English. Among other things, this would help the federal public service provide service in English or French to citizens of this country. The universities have been singled out. Perhaps I should not say that, but we have looked at what the universities are doing. As Mr. Brennick just said, the school boards and the departments of education are also very much involved in this.

Do you not think it would be preferable for universities—and I do want to choose my words carefully here—to have their students improve their proficiency in their second language, French, by studying in a university where French is the first language, such as Laval University, the Université du Québec en Outaouais, all the universities in the Université du Québec's network, and also the Université de Moncton? In that way, students would speak French in all their courses, and would experience genuine immersion both on campus and off, in the community where they are living.

Do you not think that this is where the focus should be, on French-language universities in French-speaking communities, so that anglophones will be able to work in French once they graduate?

•(1005)

Ms. Silvia Faitelson-Weiser: I think that in order to work well in French, students or university graduates have to have spend some time in a French-language university. The question is, how much time do they have to spend there? It may vary depending on the individual and the field of study, but, as I said earlier, one thing is clear: our young people cannot always travel to a different university during their three-year BA program. Exchanges and training programs are desirable, obviously, but at the same time, English-language universities must be able to teach some French, and French-language universities must be able to teach English. It is not realistic to think that all our young people are going to travel to different universities.

Today, thanks to technology, many exchanges are possible without any travel. A course offered by Laval University could be given in Ontario, if there is a will to do this. There are ways this can be done.

It is expensive, but the technology exists. At some point—and this why I mentioned this earlier—we will have to have short-term training programs that can take people's needs into account. Ideally, having an anglophone spend three years in Quebec and a francophone spend three years in Ontario would be the preferable option. However, I do think we have to be realistic.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Thank you.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Nadeau.

We will continue now with Mr. Pierre Lemieux.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I would like to thank the witnesses for their presentations. My questions are for Mr. Brennick.

I'm the member of Parliament for a riding located right next to Ottawa, in Eastern Ontario. I can certainly say that bilingualism is very important in my area. There are 65,000 francophones in my riding. I myself am a Franco-Ontarian, so I understand how important it is to be bilingual, to be able to speak the other language. Here in Ontario, the community is really anglophone, so we are talking about the ability to speak French. People must be competent when they speak in French.

I will ask you several questions at once, and then give you an opportunity to answer. I would like to know whether you work with French schools in Ontario, or if you work with English schools regarding immersion programs. The reason I ask the question is that in my riding, French is the minority official language.

Second, one of the assets of immersion programs is that our children are more open to their second language. However, people must be able to communicate well in their second language, in this case French. The public service is looking for young people who can speak French and English.

Do you work with the universities? What messages do you give our universities? Committee members are doing this study because they would like young people to be bilingual, to be open to the second language, but also able to speak and communicate well in their second language. We are looking at the universities to determine if they will introduce measures to encourage students to learn the other language. I would like to know whether you are working with the universities. If so, what messages are you passing on to our universities and colleges to encourage students to learn the other language?

•(1010)

[English]

Mr. David Brennick: If I might, I'll respond in English on this one.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: That's fine. We're bilingual. English or French—it's your choice.

Mr. David Brennick: The point I want to make is that we very clearly respect jurisdictional boundaries. When it comes to first language, second language, educational...we don't go there.

What we do have are partnerships with many francophone-interested bodies and entities. We look for the common ground. We think there is enough mutual interest that our children who are studying French as a second language have the opportunity to engage with, to mingle with, to learn, and to profit from....

There are some very functional and pragmatic reasons for that. For example, on the east coast, when there are touring groups from the arts and cultural organizations, we often get together with francophone groups to split the cost. It's a very pragmatic, practical thing. We both benefit.

We encourage that. We think that's very beneficial for our parents and our families that there are those opportunities. We think francophone bodies benefit as well.

On the university side, we have been actively spending time with universities to encourage them to provide a wider range of course offerings for students. If we take that one variant of French second-language immersion, we have 350,000 students across the country enrolled in immersion. The question is what happens to these students when they leave public school? They are not all going to the University of Ottawa. They are not all going to Université du Québec en Outaouais, Université de Moncton, or Faculté Saint-Jean at the University of Alberta. They are going into anglophone universities. Our question to anglophone universities is what are they doing for this population?

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: They're offering courses, but they're also requiring students to have a level of French.

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Lemieux—

[English]

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: I'll just make my last statement, Mr. Chair.

I guess where I'm coming from—you won't have time for the answer, though—is that—

[Translation]

The Chair: That is not a question.

[English]

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: —there's a university providing courses in French, but then there's also the university requiring some level of French for their graduates. I think that would actually motivate students to increase their competency in the immersion programs, because they would then have a goal. The goal wouldn't just be for them to get through high school and French immersion, but they would need to have a certain level of competence to graduate from university.

I think the primary and secondary schools are feeding into the university environment and should all be working together, whereas right now there's a big disconnect. You leave grade 12 and you don't necessarily have to be competent in your second language.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lemieux.

[English]

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Thank you for your indulgence, Mr. Chair.

[Translation]

The Chair: We will now continue with Mr. Gravelle.

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would like to thank our witnesses for being here today.

In your opening remarks, Mr. Brennick, you said that special education students are discouraged from learning a second language. Today, there are many special education students. Do you have any information or statistics that show whether all special education students or anglophone special education students are discouraged from learning French, or whether this applies to francophone students?

I would like to mention a second point. I know a new schoolteacher. I do not know whether this is true throughout the country, but in Ontario, new teachers have to pick up contracts here and there to teach science, mathematics, and all sorts of subjects. The teacher about whom I am speaking is anglophone. At one point, he was asked to teach French in a school. That would have been like asking me to teach Chinese. So he gave up and left. I would like to know whether it happens often that anglophone or francophone teachers are teaching the other language without being qualified to do so, and whether this discourages students from learning the other language.

• (1015)

Mr. David Brennick: To answer your second question, I would say that I agree entirely. One time is one time too many. However, everyone knows that in reality, these things happen. That is why we suggest encouraging, subsidizing, and facilitating the training of qualified teachers. Requests are made for programs. Sometimes, a school board will approve. For example, there was a case in British Columbia where the school board had decided favourably, but no teacher could be found. This is the reality that discourages parents.

With respect to special education, I do not have the data with me, but based on our experience, particularly for immersion programs, some people are favoured because those making the decisions believe that they will succeed. Yet, gathering from our research, particularly that of Dr. Fred Genesee from McGill University, students who have learning difficulties can learn French as a second language.

I work in Nova Scotia as assistant professor at the Saint-François Xavier University. I have taught courses at the master's level and trained teachers to provide resources and support to immersion students. This is unique in Nova Scotia. It is similar to the English program, but it is in French. Our objective is to encourage universities that train teachers to make sure that they are equipped with the ability to assist their own students. Sometimes, decisions are made for the wrong reasons, or for lack of information.

The Chair: You have one minute remaining, Mr. Gravelle.

Mr. Claude Gravelle: That's fine.

The Chair: All right, thank you very much.

Ms. Zarac now has the floor.

Mrs. Lise Zarac (LaSalle—Émard, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning. Firstly, for students to speak both languages well, we must have competent teachers. Laval University, among other universities, offers several language training programs. Mr. Brennick and Ms. Faitelson-Weiser said that these programs are not pan-American, and are therefore not accepted.

Allow me to speak of a personal example. My daughter holds a degree in teaching French as a second language from the Université du Québec in Montreal. When she moved to Ontario to teach, she was told that she did not have the required credentials to teach French, and instead, an English-speaking teacher who was not very fluent in French was given the opportunity to teach that year.

Mr. Brennick, you sit on a committee alongside the Official Languages Commissioner and members of the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada. I assume that you have raised this issue during committee meetings. What must we do to make sure that competent professors are able to teach?

Ms. Silvia Faitelson-Weiser: Your daughter was not incompetent to teach French, but she was not certified to teach in Ontario, as teaching falls under provincial jurisdiction. We train excellent teachers, but accreditation is given by the Department of Education of Quebec. In my humble opinion, there should be specific agreements that apply to language teachers. If there isn't any specific agreement, Ontario cannot recognize teachers who were trained in Quebec. Similarly, Quebec does not recognize teachers trained in British Columbia, etc.

The situation is different and varies from one province to the next in terms of sciences; but as regards languages, I think we would all be doing one another a favour if we were to agree... I know that there are certain agreements, but those agreements must be specific agreements between provincial departments of education.

•(1020)

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Thank you.

Ms. Faitelson-Weiser, you talked about the Explore program and said that funding would be reduced this year. Are your quotas the reason for this, or has funding for the program been decreased?

Ms. Silvia Faitelson-Weiser: According to what we were told, the quotas were reduced because there was less money, or perhaps because the costs increased. I do not know.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Was funding cut because you have fewer students?

Ms. Silvia Faitelson-Weiser: Everyone has seen a drop in their quotas.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: In your opinion, the program is necessary in order to deepen—

Ms. Silvia Faitelson-Weiser: It is still useful, but it is not enough. As I already stated, not everyone has the ability to travel for five weeks. Throughout North America, the definition of student is changing.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Do you agree that funding for the Explore program has been cut back?

Ms. Silvia Faitelson-Weiser: Yes.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: In that case, what would you suggest as an alternative?

Ms. Silvia Faitelson-Weiser: I would suggest an increase in funding.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: And you would keep the program.

Ms. Silvia Faitelson-Weiser: Yes.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: You would maintain the Explore program, with increased funding, to provide a greater number of students with the opportunity to speak the language. It is by practising a language that one becomes more fluent.

Ms. Silvia Faitelson-Weiser: Yes, madam.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Zarac.

Mr. Nadeau.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: I believe that our Conservative friends have the floor, for the third round.

The Chair: Indeed.

Mr. Petit, you have the floor.

Mr. Daniel Petit (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Thank you very much.

My question is for Mr. Brennick or Ms. Faitelson-Weiser.

How much time do I have?

The Chair: You have five minutes.

Mr. Daniel Petit: Thank you very much.

My questions are for Mr. Brennick or Ms. Faitelson-Weiser. I will talk to you about my own experience. I was an immigrant when I first arrived in Quebec, and my first language was not French. Therefore, I had to learn French. When I arrived in Canada, I was 10 years old. I took the classical course, wherein they taught mostly Greek and Latin. Greek is still spoken today, but Latin has become a dead language. We had access to far fewer English courses than religion courses. I was in this system for 12 years and then I attended CEGEP. CEGEPs were just being instituted, and the English courses available were still as rare as during the time I spent in classical studies.

I then entered Laval University to study law. I was surprised to see that all of my books were bilingual. In law, nothing is exclusively in French or in English. There were approximately 300 students who had graduated at the same time, since the CEGEPs had eliminated one year of study. In that class, there were anglophone students from other provinces, but the majority came from Quebec, and we all attended classes in English and in French. All of my law books, cases, federal statutes, and the Criminal Code were in both French and English.

When I left university, I went before the courts. You are undoubtedly aware that in Quebec, proceedings are in both French and English, regardless of the situation. Under its constitution, judicial proceedings are bilingual in New Brunswick. At the federal level, the same principle applies. At the Bar, an agreement was signed that allows Quebec lawyers to plead in Ontario in cases that involve federal legislation, such as the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act, or the Criminal Code.

The committee would like to see you provide assistance. There seems to be a problem regarding bilingualism within the federal public service. Ms. Faitelson-Weiser said earlier that she went to go to meet a minister in a federal building. She wanted to be able to speak French, but she had to address the employees in English. As you said, Mr. Brennick, people must be sent the message that French is useful.

The situation is such that we must adopt laws that underscore the usefulness of French. In my province, there is Bill 101. The law is being used to impose a language because the situation seems to be deteriorating. Things shouldn't have to go to that extreme. The Official Languages Act was adopted in 1968, and applies to institutions.

Mr. Brennick, you addressed a subject that is particularly compelling for me. You work on both sides. We parliamentarians want to assist linguistic groups living in a minority situation in Quebec. I hope that you are familiar with Quebec, you have travelled there. How can we encourage anglophones to study French, without having to send them to study in an English environment and then lose them? Do you understand what I'm saying? There are 14,000 anglophones in Quebec.

• (1025)

The Chair: Mr. Petit, you have less than one minute to allow the witness to respond.

Mr. Daniel Petit: Did you understand my question? I'd like Ms. Faitelson-Weiser to answer afterwards.

Mr. David Brennick: Yes.

Mr. Daniel Petit: I tried to provide an overall impression of the situation. How did we get to this point? There seems to be a problem of recruitment on Parliament Hill, on both the anglophone and francophone side.

Mr. David Brennick: I do not know. I am awaiting the answer of Ms. Faitelson-Weiser.

Ms. Silvia Faitelson-Weiser: Thank you. I'm not sure if I understood, but it is not a language problem. I will try to answer.

You gave many details on how things work in Quebec. You said that you were part of the first generation of CEGEP graduates. That goes back to the 1970s, and things have changed significantly since then.

In my opinion, there are far fewer unilingual francophone professionals in Quebec, than unilingual anglophone professionals in the rest of Canada. Why? It is a matter of necessity. It is much more vital for francophones to learn English than it is for anglophones to learn French. I don't believe that there are 40 different explanations to that. Unless we succeed at convincing anglophones in the rest of Canada that French is necessary, they will not learn French. It is as simple as that. French is not a language that they absolutely need. After sixth grade, French is forgotten. Throughout life, one learns things when one is motivated to do so. Learning poetry is absolutely useless, except for those who feel the need to learn poetry. Therefore, people must feel the need to learn French.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Faitelson-Weiser and Mr. Petit.

We will now go on to Mr. Nadeau.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Faitelson-Weiser, what you have been saying corroborates the fact that Canada is a country where francophones are assimilated at a staggering rate as soon as one moves away from Quebec or areas bordering on Quebec. One has only to consider the Franco-Ontarians, the Brayons (the inhabitants of the Madawaska Valley), and the Acadians. Paradoxically, in Western Canada, there are more anglophones learning French than they are young francophones—that is to say, young people whose mother tongue is French—who have the opportunity to learn their own language. For example, throughout Saskatchewan there are eight schools where French is the first language. In a province the size of Algeria, some people do not even have the opportunity to study in their own language, in French. In our country, section 16 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms specifies that French and English are the two official languages. This is a just a put-on; this is not the way things really are. Because I come from Ontario, and because I lived in Saskatchewan for a long time, I became the best sovereignist in the world. The goal is to ensure the existence of a country in North America where we can ensure that the French fact lives on.

Hats off to Mr. Brennick and his organization for the work that they do. From what I gather, Canadian Parents for French is responsible for some of the progress that has been made. I would like to see a 100 per cent improvement, of course, but for the time being, we must encourage the parents of children whose mother tongue is French to register their children in schools where French is the first language.

I am going to ask Mr. Brennick my next question, then I will move on to Ms. Faitelson-Weiser.

Wouldn't you agree that all these efforts to produce bilingual university graduates who can speak English and French well and who are functional enough to join the federal public service should start with the school boards and the education ministries, rather than at the university level?

• (1030)

Mr. David Brennick: I myself would say that this is everyone's responsibility. Some people within the public education system think that we can do it all. We are involved in the initial stages of development, that is to say we sow the seeds. Yes, this is where it all begins, but we encourage people, we provide the foundation, so to speak. Certainly, people themselves must also accept their share of responsibility.

Earlier, we were talking about standards, and this issue must be very clear. We mentioned the Common European Framework because at the beginning of our late immersion program, we used to issue a certificate with the word "bilingual" on it. Some students went to possible employers and said to them,

[*English*]

"I'm bilingual. Look, this is what it says."

[*Translation*]

But they weren't truly bilingual. We changed the certificate and now it clearly states the person is a graduate of a late immersion program.

Let's talk about the Common European Framework. It shifts the responsibility onto the shoulders of the young people: They say that they want to have a B level of proficiency. What does having a B level mean?

The purpose of this framework is to allow you, as an employer, to know what you can require of a person who has a B level of proficiency. It's better this way, rather than having each person give his own interpretation of what it means. This is an example of what we mean when we talk about standards.

And what about the guidance counsellors in the schools? One of their responsibilities is to share employment information with the students and to let them know what will be available in the future on the job market. Who is requiring knowledge of our languages? Where is the demand? In the final analysis, we all share this responsibility.

Ms. Silvia Faitelson-Weiser: I agree. It's far more general than that. There is an old principle in the world of psycholinguistics that still seems to hold true. People tend to learn what they think is the more prestigious language, which can change. Unless everyone within Canadian society, encouraged not by legislation but rather by government, feels that French is a prestigious language, on par with English...

This is not a problem at the level of elementary schools, high schools or universities. The question is whether society wishes to perhaps set itself apart from other societies in North America because it is bilingual. American society may become bilingual too one day, but for the time being, American society is unilingual English, and Mexican society in turn is a Spanish-speaking unilingual society.

• (1035)

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: We have finished the three rounds. Would any other committee member perhaps wish to...

Mr. Chong sponsored this study.

Mr. Chong, if you would like to say something, go ahead.

[English]

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have a question for the Canadian Parents for French.

[Translation]

The Chair: Excuse me, Mr. Chong.

[English]

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill-Gordon (Miramichi, CPC): I wasn't prepared for a question earlier, but I do have one now. But that is okay, let Michael go first.

Hon. Michael Chong: Go ahead.

[Translation]

The Chair: Fine.

[English]

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill-Gordon: Mine is very fast and easy.

First of all, I have to say I am not a regular member on this committee, but I am certainly happy to be here today, coming from New Brunswick, our only legally bilingual province in Canada. Secondly, prior to being an MP, I was a teacher and taught at a French immersion school. So I do have quite an interest in this topic and I am happy to be here today.

I was interested in the program that Mr. Brennick teaches at the university. You mentioned that, and I was interested in what more it does and how it works.

I've lost track with Nova Scotia. I am wondering if you have early French immersion there as well.

Mr. David Brennick: The range of offerings in French second language across the country is varied. So in our province of Nova Scotia we have early immersion, middle immersion, and late immersion, integrated French, core French. So we have the variety.

My own experience where I work is late immersion. We made that decision.

With respect to St. Francis Xavier University, what they did was parallel one they had in existence. It's a master's of education in resource. It is for the formation of resource teachers to work in schools with students with learning disabilities.

This one is taught in French. There are a number of us who teach different pieces. There is a cohort of eighteen. Nine, I believe, come from the Halifax Regional School Board, where they have early immersion.

So these are teachers who will end up in schools providing support to students who may experience.... That supports what we know from the work that all children can achieve success, if they have the support. Some children need more support than others.

We are very pleased about that in Nova Scotia. We are very happy with that. In fact, there is a second cohort starting in January.

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill-Gordon: I find it very interesting, of course, and I'm glad to have heard about it.

The Chair: Mr. Chong.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a short comment and question for Canadian Parents for French.

There are as many Canadians now with a non-official language as their mother tongue as there are francophones living in this country. I think the rapidly changing demographic makeup of this country is something that a lot of people aren't aware of in Ottawa. For example, Chinese is taught as the first language in three of the larger provinces in this country, in Ontario, Alberta, and British Columbia.

More worrisome, I think, is that the number of bilingual anglophones aged 15 to 19 has declined precipitously in the last decade, according to Statistics Canada, from about 16% in 1996 to 13% in 2006. These are very disappointing numbers, especially considering that we've had an action plan on official languages, launched by the previous government and continued by the present government, that has poured billions of dollars into trying to raise the profile of both languages, but especially French, in Canada.

My question to you is why are these numbers in decline, specifically the numbers for bilingual anglophones coming out of our education system? Why did the action plan, launched in 2003, not go anywhere in achieving its objective of doubling the number of bilingual students aged 15 to 19?

Mr. David Brennick: You ask good and difficult questions.

I would like to seat that in a larger context and say that learning is a lifelong activity, and that to expect immediate results would be premature, I think, and would not do service to the intent.

There are a couple of things. One is that you're correct in terms of the changing demographic of our country. We spoke earlier about the allophones and the changing demographic. What we know is that there is tremendous interest in French as a second language on the part of some of our non-francophone non-anglophone communities, about which we are very encouraged. We know that is the case in lower mainland B.C., in Toronto, and in some of our larger centres.

Earlier we touched on a piece about the calls on the time and the interest of young people, and we find there are lots of distractions. I think that's in part a response to that. The other piece is the fact—I don't know where it is in the rest of the country, but I know it is so where I live—that we deal with declining enrollment. Whenever we look at the numbers of students, where we are today is not where we were ten years ago. I don't know if it's increasing everywhere, but I think we need to reflect that in terms of...

We are a group of volunteers. I think we need to not forget that. We're people who value and are supportive of opportunities for young Canadians to learn French as a second language, and in many different ways. That is why our involvement is oftentimes with school systems, but oftentimes in providing opportunities outside of schools, such as summer camps, which I mentioned earlier, or agreements we have with universities, with the French embassy.

At the end of the day, the take-up on this is going to be on the part of individuals and families. Ours is one of trying to encourage and say that it's great in our country, given our history, given the universality of having French in the world, and that it's a logical choice for us. We have banded around that wagon and theme. We enjoy the support. We also want to make others aware of the fact that

there are many ways to achieve functional bilingualism. We have many hybrids in Canada. We're very proud of our stature worldwide, and we continue to do that.

We know there is a drop. In school systems sometimes, for example, we talk about the drop in social studies programs. We talk about the drop in some other programs that are offered, because people are drawn to math and science. So we ask: what is a balanced education?

It was mentioned earlier about acquiring French before leaving university. There was a time when the educated person, sort of a renaissance person, I suppose, would be one who did have a second language at graduation. But that has changed. What we're trying to do is to stop the tide of devaluing and rather show that there are great and wonderful personal experiences and enrichments developmentally, along with some practical ones in terms of job-related, functional, tangible reasons for one to have a second language.

We stand in front of French as a second language, but we are very supportive within that larger context of a second language.

● (1040)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chong, and thank you, Mr. Brennick. You could no better conclude this session.

I want to thank you again, Madame Weiser, for your statement and your comments. I would also like to point out you were the first one to raise the importance of promoting bilingualism among the allophones, which is a point that will be taken in care as well as all your recommendations.

I just want to thank you on behalf of the committee, because I was striving for a few things on this study, and I think your testimony this morning has been very helpful.

Thank you again.

[*Translation*]

We will see one another again at the next committee meeting. Thank you very much.

The meeting stands adjourned.

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