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The Honourable Michael Chong

Standing Committee on Official Languages

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• (1600)

[Translation]

The Chair (Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC)): Welcome to the 82nd meeting of the Standing Committee on Official Language on this Thursday, May 23, 2013.

[English]

We are here pursuant to Standing Order 108 for a study on second official language immersion programs in Canada.

[Translation]

Today we have with us Mr. Corbeil and Mr. Nault, from Statistics Canada, and Mr. Maddix and Mr. Paul, from the Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones.

Welcome.

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle (Rivière-du-Nord, NDP): Mr. Chair, before we start, I have a question for you concerning Minister Kenney's appearance.

We introduced a motion on February 7. Have we received any news on this matter? We have been waiting for three months for confirmation of a meeting with the minister.

The Chair: No date has yet been set for the minister's appearance.

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: Will we be able to meet with him before the end of the session?

The Chair: I believe so.

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: This is taking a long time.

The Chair: The clerk reached Mr. Kenney's office yesterday, and they discussed a possible date for his appearance, June 4, 6 or 13.

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: Bravo for your efforts.

The Chair: Then we will begin with the Statistics Canada representatives.

Mr. François Nault (Director, Social and Aboriginal Statistics Division, Statistics Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank the members of the committee for inviting Statistics Canada to appear and offer input to their discussion on the state of affairs and historical evolution of enrolment in language immersion programs in Canada and the related issues.

Before I begin, I would like to point out that, since Statistics Canada does not have information to measure access to those programs, their capacity, waiting lists or best practices, the presentation by my colleague Jean-Pierre Corbeil will focus mainly on data that Statistics Canada collects on changes in student

enrolments and the portion of students enrolled in immersion programs in Canada compared with enrolment in other French as a second language programs.

Mr. Corbeil will also provide information on the second language retention level of students who attended these programs compared with that of other students.

Now I will hand the floor over to him.

Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil (Assistant Director, Chief Specialist, Language Statistics Section, Statistics Canada): Thank you, François.

First, we must remember that barely 10 years after the start of a 1965 experimental project led by two McGill University researchers at an elementary school in Saint-Lambert on the South Shore of Montreal—a project that gave rise to immersion programs across Canada and around the world—there were roughly 250 schools outside Quebec offering a French immersion program.

Immersion programs were so popular that, in just three years, between the 1981-1982 and 1984-1985 school years, the number of schools offering immersion programs went from 570 to 1,140. In the 2001-2002 school year, the last year for which this information is available, nearly 2,000 public schools outside Quebec offered a French immersion program.

Of course, growth in the number of schools outside Quebec offering French immersion programs is reflected in enrolment growth. Over the last 30 years, the number of public school students enrolled in a French immersion program has gone from 39,000 to 341,705.

However, this growth has not been constant: steady enrolment growth between 1981 and 1992 was followed by a period of relative stagnation, if not decline, between 1992 and 2003, and then another period of enrolment growth between the 2004-2005 and 2010-2011 school years. Note that the number of students in immersion programs increased by 52,735, or 18%, between the 2004-2005 and 2010-2011 school years, compared with an increase of barely 6% in the preceding decade.

The resurgence in enrolment in immersion programs since 2004 varies widely from one province or territory to another. For example, in Ontario, where close to 190,000 students are enrolled in an immersion program, 54.4% of all enrolments outside Quebec, the number of students increased 24%. In comparison, British Columbia and Alberta saw increases of 26% and 16%, respectively, in the number of immersion students.

Despite its small population, the province of Newfoundland and Labrador has the highest growth in immersion program enrolment since 2004, at more than 34%, for a total of 8,700 students in 2010-2011.

• (1605)

[*English*]

Now let me put immersion program enrollment increases into context. I would like to point out to members of the committee that over the last 20 years, growth in the number and proportion of students enrolled in French immersion programs in provinces and territories outside Quebec has taken place as the number of youth enrolled in a regular French as a second language program has significantly decreased.

Since the 1991-92 school year, the number of youth enrolled in an immersion program has gone from more than 267,000 to nearly 342,000, a 27.7% increase. In contrast, the number of youth enrolled in a regular French as a second language program fell from 1.8 million to 1.36 million, a 24% decrease. In short, despite the rise in immersion program enrolment, the proportion of youth outside Quebec who have received French as a second language instruction in the last 20 years has fallen from 53.3% to 43.9%.

This reality, as shown by the statistics for programs and school enrolment collected from the education ministries and departments of each province and territory, is reflected in the census data on knowledge of official languages, in particular since the 1996 census.

Since non-francophones in a number of regions outside Quebec normally learn French in school, the rate of English-French bilingualism peaks between the ages of 15 and 19, when youth are finishing high school. Many teenagers in this age group were in fact enrolled in a French as a second language or immersion program. However, since the 1996 census, bilingualism has declined among youth in this age group whose first official language spoken is English. The proportion of these young people who could conduct a conversation in both official languages was 15.2% in 1996. It decreased steadily to 11.2% in 2011, down four percentage points.

The different ways in which non-francophones outside Quebec learn French at school have very diverse effects on one of the key issues in the evolution of English-French bilingualism in Canada, namely second-language retention over time.

Census data clearly show that the rate of bilingualism in 15 to 19-year-old non-francophones outside Quebec declines as they leave school and grow older. For example, the cohort of 15 to 19-year-old anglophones outside Quebec in 1996 had a bilingualism rate of 15.2%. Fifteen years later, in 2011, when they were 25 to 34, their rate had decreased by nearly half.

Seen from a different angle, by tracking various cohorts of youth aged 5 to 9 years old across censuses, we note the same sequence of events, no matter the cohort. For example, youth aged 5 to 9 years old in 1981 had a bilingualism rate of 3.4%. Ten years later, at the age of 15 to 19, that rate reached nearly 14%. At the age of 25 to 29, that rate had declined to less than 10% to finally stand at 7% 10 years later in 2011.

Note that the level of bilingualism and the retention of French as a second language over time vary considerably depending on whether one was enrolled in an immersion or intensive program or in a regular French as a second language program.

A study conducted by Statistics Canada using data from the “Youth in Transition Survey” revealed a considerable gap between the bilingualism rate of 21-year-olds who were enrolled in a French immersion program and the rate of those who had not been enrolled in an immersion program. The 2006 “Youth in Transition Survey” collected information on the cohort of youth who had participated in the 2000 program for international student assessment when they were 15. The 2006 data therefore helped us to link the youth's self-assessment of their ability to converse in English and French at age 21 with past enrolment in some form of French or English second-language immersion, extended or intensive French.

This study shows that more than 80% of non-francophone youth outside Quebec have never been enrolled in a French immersion or extended program. Only 6% of them have reported being able to conduct a conversation in French at age 21. In contrast, those who had been enrolled in a French immersion or extended program had a rate of English-French bilingualism of 57%.

• (1610)

[*Translation*]

However, the much higher rate of bilingualism—and therefore the much higher retention rate—of youth who had been enrolled in an immersion program varies depending on the number of years spent in the program and when the youth were first enrolled in the program. Youth who had been enrolled in an immersion program for at least six school years had a bilingualism rate of 75% at age 21. As well, youth who had been enrolled in an immersion program before grade 4 had a rate of bilingualism of 64% at age 21, compared with a rate of 45% for youth who had been first enrolled in grade 4 or later.

Lastly, note that, for youth who were enrolled in immersion at the elementary level only, the rate of bilingualism at age 21 was approximately 40%, compared with 66% for those who continued in the program to the secondary level. The statistics presented here lead to the following findings.

First, the bilingualism rate in 15- to 19-year-old non-francophones outside Quebec has been dropping for the last 15 years. This situation is the result of a number of factors, including a significant decrease in the number and proportion of youth exposed to the instruction of French. In addition, second language skills are gradually lost, primarily because few opportunities exist to use the second language once high school is finished.

Second, there seems to be clear interest in enrolling in French immersion programs, as shown by the 28% increase in French immersion enrolment over the last 20 years. As well, given the high bilingualism and second-language retention rates in young adults who have been enrolled in immersion programs in elementary and high school, it seems obvious that the rate of bilingualism in non-francophones outside Quebec would be even lower, were it not for the success of immersion programs across the country.

In closing, I would like to say that the information we received from our provincial and territorial partners has been critical in helping us to monitor changes in enrolment in French as a second language programs in Canada. Combining the various sources of statistical data has been most useful to inform the public debate on issues surrounding official language learning in Canada.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now I will hand the floor over to the Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones.

Mr. Robert Maddix (President, Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones): Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

I am representing the Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones today as its President. I am also President of Prince Edward Island's Commission scolaire de langue française. I am here with our federation's Executive Director, Mr. Roger Paul.

We want to thank you for your invitation to appear before the Standing Committee on Official Languages as part of your study on second official language immersion programs in Canada.

Who are we? Our presentation this afternoon will allow us to tell you more about the federation, while sharing the organization's point of view on national education, specifically immersion programs.

The federation is responsible for representing the interests of the 29 francophone and Acadian school boards in every Canadian province and territory, except Quebec. It is active on a political level with the various bodies involved, and on the pedagogical and administrative level through the Regroupement national des directions générales de l'éducation, within which the country's 29 directors of education operate.

With regard to our link with immersion, allow me to tell you from the start that immersion programs are not part of the federation's scope of activity. However, we take great interest in the deployment of these programs since they help develop and promote linguistic duality in Canada, as does the French-language education system.

Now I will hand the floor over to our Executive Director, Mr. Paul.

•(1615)

Mr. Roger Paul (Executive Director, Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones): Thank you, Mr. Maddix.

Good afternoon, everyone.

To begin with, I would like to set the record straight on language learning. First of all, allow me to quote Pierre Calvé, a former

linguistics and education professor at the University of Ottawa, to explain our point of view on immersion programs. He said the following:

A language basically serves four purposes: a) to communicate; b) to think, reflect and develop ideas; c) to obtain and store information; d) to forge an identity as a member of a specific human community.

In our view, learning the language both in immersion programs and in French-language schools achieves these four functions of a language, be it a person's first or second.

I want to draw a distinction between immersion and French-language school. In addition to making it possible to communicate, think and obtain information, learning a second language in an immersion program helps build a Canadian identity characterized by linguistic and cultural duality. In French-language schools, language learning occurs in a linguistic, cultural and civic context. In other words, all activities related to teaching the curriculum contribute to the learning of French as a first language, whether it be shows, the arts, celebrations, mathematics or science. We learn and we build our cultural identity as much during mathematics and science classes as in French classes. This characterizes our French-language schools.

As a result, the cultural approach of teaching in a French-language civic community school contributes to and influences the construction of an individual and collective cultural identity. When students enter the school, they therefore construct an individual and collective cultural identity characteristic of the francophone and Acadian communities that created Canada.

You asked us to offer some recommendations. The Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones has three recommendations to submit to you. Immersion programs and French-language schools respond to specific and complementary needs from a national unity perspective. We therefore think it is essential to ensure they are developed and promoted in an enlightened and fair way for all Canadians.

Our first recommendation concerns information and promotion. Therefore, we hope your committee will recommend in its report that the Canadian government support the steps taken to inform the Canadian population, including immigrants, that we have a French-language education system and immersion programs in English-language schools, and to explain the distinction between the particular scope and mandate of both systems. We believe that if all Canadians had a better understanding of this distinction, there might be a decrease in the high percentage of students from eligible families who do not attend French-language schools.

According to Rodrigue Landry's studies, barely one in two rights holders attends French-language schools. Where are these rights holders?

This approach, which is based on information and promotion, might help resolve the problem of the capacity of immersion schools to respond to the ever-growing demand and enable French-language schools to fulfill their mission.

Our second recommendation concerns funding. The basic distinction between immersion schools and French-language schools also involves separate funding. In that respect, we hope your committee will recommend better accountability with respect to education transfer payments from the federal government to the provinces and territories. Currently, it is almost impossible to know exactly how these amounts are used. However, it seems that considerable amounts intended for education in French as a first language were used to develop immersion programs, and perhaps vice versa as well; we do not know. There is a significant need when it comes to French-language education, and federal contributions set aside for it are essential to deploying a French-language education system.

• (1620)

Our third and final recommendation concerns the continuum.

When the time comes to make the important choice of education language, Canadians consider a combination of factors related to accessibility and quality of instruction, among other things. One factor influencing this decision is the possibility of doing postsecondary studies in the language of choice.

To that end, we hope your committee will recommend to the Canadian government that it look into postsecondary teaching in French so that Canadians can choose a school that offers French-as-a-second-language immersion or French-as-a-first-language education, with the assurance that they can continue their studies in French at the postsecondary level. That goes directly back to what our colleague Mr. Corbeil just mentioned. Students do not have the opportunity to speak the language. There is therefore no follow-up and perhaps no opportunities. Consequently, they become discouraged.

By doing so, we are guaranteeing our country a generation of bilingual young professionals who are able to take on our society's political, economic and cultural levers.

Mr. Robert Maddix: As a national organization with a major interest in the vitality of the francophone and Acadian communities, the federation recognizes the importance of bilingualism for all Canadians. The additive bilingualism we are recommending ensures harmony between the two founding peoples of this country. We believe that immersion schools are a vital tool that our society has to enable Canada's anglophone population to become bilingual. It is with that in mind that we made these recommendations.

Thank you again for your invitation. We would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Maddix.

Mr. Maddix and Mr. Paul must leave at 5:00 p.m. Consequently, if you have any questions for them, you must ask them before they do so.

Mr. Dionne Labelle, you have the floor.

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon and welcome, everyone.

It is always interesting to meet with the people from Statistics Canada. The last time we met, the demolinguistic figures had just been published. I believe that was in October 2012. You reported that bilingualism had levelled off in Canada and declined in the young group of 15- to 19-year-olds. I find it interesting that we have data on that age group because these people will have children in 10 years. At the same time, we know that the use of French in the home is declining in Canada. Currently, 1,380,000 students have access to second-language courses. How many students in Canada never have any contact with French?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil: First of all, the number you mentioned is higher. Indeed, 1.4 million students outside Quebec are enrolled in regular French as a second language instruction programs. As I mentioned earlier, approximately 57% of young people today have no contact with French-language instruction, either in immersion or core French programs. That is 57%.

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: So that means that 57% of young Canadian students never have any contact with the French language.

Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil: I do not know whether they never have any contact with French, but—

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: No, but that is the case at school.

• (1625)

Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil: That is true at school.

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: Consequently, they have no concept of linguistic duality, or very little. How do you explain that?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil: I will not offer an opinion on that.

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: However, that is my conclusion. If you never have any contact with the French language at school and if no one is teaching it, linguistic duality does not mean much.

How do you explain the decline from 1.8 million to 1.4 million? How can that be explained?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil: Are you talking about the decline of 400,000 persons, from 1.8 million to 1.4 million?

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: Yes, that is a drop. Is it because that young cohort is smaller? How do we explain that?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil: I am going to take this opportunity to do a little advertising.

On May 28, Statistics Canada will publish a study on the evolution of bilingualism over the past 50 years. Immigration, in particular, is a factor. However, it must be understood that education is a provincial jurisdiction. Instruction in French as a second language is not mandatory in most provinces west of Ontario. There may be all kinds of reasons for that, but the fact that the composition of Canada's population is undergoing profound change is also a factor. That is all I can say for the moment.

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: I am obviously trying to understand this situation. Despite the influx of immigrants, if institutions continue to teach French, those people should normally learn it at least as a second language.

Now I am going to put my questions to our other two guests.

What is your assessment of the roadmap? Has that funding been beneficial to you? If so, how do you explain the fact that, following the roadmap, we are in a situation in which bilingualism is declining?

Mr. Roger Paul: First of all, I would say that, yes, the roadmap has been very beneficial. We have benefited in many ways.

In response to the second part of your question, as to why bilingualism is declining, there are several scenarios that could explain that phenomenon. However, I do not necessarily want to venture into that area. I am not an expert on language retention, although I may have some expertise on language retention by minority members learning English. English and bilingualism in our French-language schools are not declining, on the contrary.

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: Last week, some immersion school teachers came to testify and told us that the quality of teachers instructing young Canadians in schools where the second language is being taught was generally not up to scratch. There appear to be enormous problems recruiting teachers with good French-language proficiency in the school system.

Are you aware of that situation?

Mr. Roger Paul: I cannot offer an opinion for them, but I would say that many people teaching in immersion schools are also products of French-as-a-first-language education facilities. I can tell you that I do not think those teachers are products of these schools, and there are a lot of them in the immersion schools—

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: I was not talking about immersion schools. I was really talking about instruction in French as a second language in the public schools.

Mr. Roger Paul: As for instruction in French as a second language in the public schools, many of those teachers have been trained to teach French as a first language. They have an additional qualification to teach French as a second language. I believe this situation is the same as in any system. Perhaps some teachers need more training and experience.

However, based on the information I have, many of those teachers are highly qualified. They are very good, very suitable and very effective. However, it is possible that some teachers need additional assistance. You see that in any system.

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: Do you believe there would be room in the roadmap to support and improve this aspect?

• (1630)

Mr. Roger Paul: If that is a priority for instruction in French as both a first and second language, then I think there is room for that. That should be the case.

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: Do your federations have any teacher exchange programs with English-language school boards?

Mr. Roger Paul: No.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dionne Labelle.

Mr. Gourde, you have the floor.

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to our witnesses for being with us today.

I will begin with the Statistics Canada figures.

The decision for Canadians to enrol their children in immersion courses is often motivated either by cultural factors or, economically speaking, by the hope that their children can find high-quality jobs. In some respects, bilingualism can lead to interesting jobs.

However, are you able to measure the income levels of people who claim to be bilingual relative to those of other Canadians as a whole? Is there a difference? If so, do you have those details on a province-by-province basis?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil: Yes, absolutely.

That information, which many people are interested in, is available in the data from censuses prior to 2011. It can be found in the National Household Survey, from which income information will be published in August. It is possible to determine average income by industry and professional sector.

In fact, it must always be understood that several factors are involved. Frequently, it is not so much bilingualism that influences income levels as the use of both languages. When you compare people who are bilingual, those who are required to use their second language at work generally have higher incomes than those who are bilingual but do not necessarily have the opportunity to use both languages in their workplace. That information is indeed available from Statistics Canada sources.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: You said in your presentation that students tended to lose their French after their postsecondary studies. One can imagine that some have the opportunity to work in an environment—a working or other environment—in which they can use both languages but that others return to an environment in which only one language is used.

Do you think the latter situation may cause students who have been enrolled in English- or French-language immersion to lose their second language?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil: The research quite clearly shows that the environment in which the person lives and, of course, contact with that language are the principal factors involved in maintaining second-language proficiency. Studies on the first immersion programs have clearly shown that the support and supervision that students are given by their schools and parents and the fact that they live in an environment enabling them to use their second language are enormous factors in enabling them to retain their language skills.

Many young anglophones who left English-language schools and then learned French say they no longer have an opportunity to use the language once they leave the school environment. Many francophones decide to speak English because they feel that no one around them speaks French. This kind of communication may be a problem precisely because no value is necessarily attached to the use of French in that environment. Further research must be conducted in order to gain a clearer understanding of why some individuals who left immersion programs and whose bilingualism levels were very high subsequently managed to maintain those levels.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Failing an opportunity to use their second official language in their environment, could people be encouraged to watch television programs or use social media, such as Facebook, the Internet or Skype, for example, to make contact with young people from other environments in their second language? Those people have spent 6 to 12 years of their lives learning a second language, which requires motivation. Unfortunately, they lose virtually all their language skills in four or five years. We must find a way to motivate them to preserve that human capital, that learning in which they have invested so much.

Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil: Of course, everything depends on valuing the language. A purely instrumental perception of the use of languages is very different from one in which a person values language learning and considers it an asset. Language is not just a means of communication. As my colleagues mentioned, it is also a way of expressing and conveying a culture. In my opinion, if we convey the richness of Canada's two dominant cultures, we will already have some of the ingredients.

• (1635)

Mr. Jacques Gourde: My next question is for the Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones.

Immersion courses are really very popular. However, other witnesses said they really had trouble finding qualified, high-quality teachers. Demand is really very high.

If demand increased by 20% and these children had the opportunity to enrol in these programs, would we currently have enough teachers or would we have to create programs and motivate teachers to give those courses? If there are no teachers, it will be impossible to continue even if we create other courses.

Mr. Roger Paul: We talked about promoting the importance of immersion, of French as a first language and as a second language. We also talked about valuing, but do we value linguistic duality enough? That may be what will motivate future teachers to go and teach in the schools.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: I believe that the best francophone teachers are Quebecers. I know a few. They are young people who have gone to work in other provinces. They try that for three or four years, but, as a result of the isolation, 50% of them return to Quebec to teach in other fields or simply change professions.

Should we offer support to teachers who leave their province? If they are prepared to leave for the next 25 years, they must rebuild their lives, taking the good with the bad, as the saying goes, but it does not necessarily come automatically.

Mr. Roger Paul: We know a lot about that issue in the French-language schools. Isolation is a major factor. There is a way to break out of that isolation by networking. There are all kinds of ways to do that today. You yourself talked about the importance of, and current access to social media, access via Skype and access to courses of all kinds. Some teachers associations promote this kind of networking.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Dion, you have the floor.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to our four witnesses for being here.

Mr. Nault and Mr. Corbeil, you are going to release a study on May 28. Can you give us a scoop? What else is there in that study that is not already in what we have here?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil: When we published the census data on October 24, there was very little information on the evolution of bilingualism. Many people are increasingly interested in the factors influencing the evolution of bilingualism over the years. I think that is somewhat the purpose of this study, the aim of which is to identify those main factors.

I can say one interesting thing. You will recall that, 50 years ago, we started to ask serious questions about how to promote bilingualism in Canada. Few people know how strongly bilingualism grew over the first 20 years following the Bilingualism and Biculturalism Commission. I can simply tell you that the purpose of this brief article is to quantify the evolution of this phenomenon and to put the finger on some of the key factors that have influenced the evolution of bilingualism over the years.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: I cannot wait to read your report, which will be published on May 28, but we can see in this one today that there has been a recovery among immersion schools. There has not really been a decline, but perhaps slowing growth. Now there is a recovery. I am pleased about that because, when I became Minister responsible for Official Languages in 2000, we saw that Parents for French was increasingly becoming Grandparents for French. We were afraid there would be no succession. We really made an effort in all that to relaunch immersion. Now we can say that a new generation of parents has gone through it and is relaunching it.

• (1640)

Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil: I agree with you. In recent years, people reacted when we noted the decline in bilingualism among young people in Canada. Some people may have been inclined to think that immersion programs were not working. The statistics we presented today show quite clearly how interest is increasing in these programs. They also show that people who have gone through immersion programs maintain their bilingualism for a much longer time.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: I do not know whether it is justified, but there is nevertheless a fear that there will be less of a push for regular schools to promote French since the most highly motivated students attend immersion schools.

Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil: Yes, that is not impossible.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: It would be a mistake for this committee to focus solely on immersion schools because this may conceal a decline. In fact, it does conceal a decline. Your statistics show that quite clearly.

Before putting my last question to Mr. Maddix and Mr. Paul, I would like to note that retention is much better in immersion schools than in schools where regular core French courses are given. There is nevertheless some loss, and we are surprised to see what happens to students who may have spent six years of their lives supposedly taking all their courses in French. People in the upper spheres know that is not entirely the case. The fact that there is a loss of 25% or even a third, according to some of your figures, is somewhat troubling. How can you spend all of high school in immersion school and not be bilingual in the end?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil: That is why I said earlier that this shows how important it is to study the matter in greater depth. We have figures showing that we should investigate further to explain what distinguishes those who maintain their skills from those who do not. Of course, the environment and workplace issue very definitely plays a role.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: It is not just that; some students also complete their immersion programs without being bilingual. Our fear is that the bilingualism of some schools is a superficial bilingualism. These are immersion schools. They attract people and impart a certain prestige, but it has to be determined whether the teachers are really qualified, if French is indeed spoken in mathematics classes and so on. I wonder whether the immersion concept is not diluted in some cases.

Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil: I think that confirms the need to study the matter in greater—

Hon. Stéphane Dion: But you do not have any figures on which to verify that.

Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil: No. It is more difficult. However, it would not be impossible to add a module to an existing survey so that we can ask relevant questions on the subject. I am thinking, for example, of the General Social Survey, which represents a sample of 25,000 people. We could put questions to people who have taken an immersion program and ask them whether they have maintained their skills. The option is there.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: All right, thank you very much.

Mr. Maddix and Mr. Paul, in your report, you stated a quite disturbing fact, which we nevertheless suspect is true: that the provinces transfer funds and that the communities' schools do not always get the benefit in that case.

Could you tell us more about that?

Mr. Robert Maddix: I will respond first and then Roger will be able to continue.

It varies from province to province. The community and school boards are not involved in the process of saying exactly why they need funding. Is it to train and retain teachers? We are not involved in submitting funding applications and we are not asked why we need funding. In some provinces and territories, once the funding is

transferred, those people have no input into the allocation of funding among immersion, French-language instruction and so on.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: These are ultimately two different funding streams. There is funding for immersion and there is funding for community schools. Your paragraph suggests that—

• (1645)

Mr. Robert Maddix: That is correct. We have no indication. We are not involved in that. Consequently, we cannot know what funding goes to immersion and what goes to French-language instruction.

At home in Prince Edward Island, funding is allocated to program development, but if funding is taken away from the French-language section, it is to develop core French programs, immersion programs and French as a first language programs.

The allocation of funding is really confused. We would like to be more involved in the process.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: The federal-provincial agreements do not clarify that?

Mr. Robert Maddix: The systems vary with the provinces.

Mr. Roger Paul: As Mr. Maddix just mentioned, it differs from one province to the next. The information is obviously hard to get.

Here is the most flagrant example, and it is public. In Yukon, the deputy minister admitted that a sum of slightly more than \$1 that was to be allocated to French as a first language was allocated to French as a second language. That is just one example, but if there is one, there may be others. How do we know that? No one knows. As for accountability, once the funding is granted to the department, it can wash its hands of the matter.

It goes even further than that. In several of our provinces, the school board—in many cases, there is only one French-language school board for the province—is not even invited to the table when talks take place between the federal government and the provinces. And yet we are talking about funding that will be used for our programs.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Paul. Thank you, Mr. Dion.

Mr. Trottier, you have the floor.

Mr. Bernard Trottier (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to the witnesses for being here today.

Mr. Maddix and Mr. Paul, you have provided some clear details on the various ways to teach French in a minority setting. Education is quite fragmented in the sense that there are core French programs, immersion programs, French as a first language programs and, in provinces such as Ontario, a Catholic school system and a public school system.

Students in my city, Toronto, have a lot of choice. Sometimes there is no real concept of what a rights holder is, in that French is often taught as a first language in an immersion school for non-francophones. They are legally entitled to that. These young students may attend French-language schools even if they are not francophone. It is a legal issue that concerns the route that students take to go to school in the morning, for example.

Do you think it undermines students' education to attend a French-language school when they should be going to an immersion school? That is often more or less the case in the same community or region. We have a mix of students. Does that detract from the experience of one group or the other? I do not know whether you have had that experience.

Mr. Roger Paul: Yes.

Mr. Bernard Trottier: This is a real problem in Toronto and there are a lot of disputes among parents. Some parents do not want non-rights holders to attend those schools and lower the quality of French-language education.

Mr. Roger Paul: That is an excellent question.

I am getting ready to go and testify at a trial in British Columbia where I will be asked the question you just asked me, whether we should accept students who do not master French or speak it at all at our French-language schools. A parallel can also be drawn with immersion schools.

Do the linguistic strengths or weaknesses of certain students influence other students who are trying to learn French and to master the language and culture?

Based on our experience, the answer is no. I will explain why. I am mainly talking about language learning for the youngest students, who come to us in junior kindergarten or kindergarten. That is usually when the parents choose a school for their children. We rarely see parents choose a school when their children are in grades 7 or 8. They choose the school based on language and do so when their children are very young. At that age, children are sponges who soak up information. I am not saying that those children will become perfectly bilingual, but I am saying that a young child who enters a French-language school in September can speak French in December.

There are definitely support programs and we try to group students together based on their language levels. However, there is no evidence that accepting students who do not master the language will have a negative impact on the other students.

● (1650)

Mr. Bernard Trottier: All right.

One of the questions the committee is asking as part of this study concerns capacity. We see real capacity problems in the Toronto region because demand for immersion programs is greater than supply.

What do you think determines these capacity problems in these kinds of situations? Is it a shortage of teachers, material or will on the school board's part?

Mr. Roger Paul: My impression is that there could be several explanations. If we are talking about supply and demand, there definitely appears to be too much demand relative to available opportunities, that is to say human resources.

I was the executive director of a school board. Consequently, I would not necessarily say there is too much demand relative to financial resources. In a school, there are x students and x dollars allocated to services. I think it is more a question of availability of human resources.

The Chair: All right, thank you.

Mr. Galipeau, you have the floor.

Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC): I would like to ask a supplementary question on teaching choices.

With regard to anglophone students attending French-language schools rather than French immersion schools, I can understand that things can go quite well in the classroom. However, the most frustrating problem for the teachers and parents of francophone students does not arise in the classroom but rather in the school yard. Francophone children do not speak English, particularly in the official language minority communities. Then they become friends with an anglophone child. That is easy to do.

Quite naturally, if 10 francophone children and 1 anglophone child are together in the school yard, they will speak the common language, English. That frustrates students' teachers and parents. Then teachers become exasperated and punish the students. If they shout at the students to speak French, that is enough for them not to want to do it.

This issue has always bothered me. We should develop incentives to help these exasperated teachers forget punishment and use incentives. What can we do to prevent the declining use of French in the school yard? Socialization is as important in teaching as what goes on in the classroom.

● (1655)

Mr. Roger Paul: That question goes back a number of years.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: What is the answer to it?

Mr. Roger Paul: I am going to give it to you and it may surprise you. The answer lies in the approach. To ask the question is to answer it.

As you mentioned, punishment absolutely does not encourage students to change the way they do things. The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, or CMEC, subsidizes various programs, including one that has just been introduced. It is intended for French-language schools, of course, but I believe it could also benefit immersion schools. The aim of the program is to show teachers that the fact that someone has 20 years' teaching experience does not mean that person should not change approaches.

So it all comes down to approach. For example, you have to try to empower students and to speak openly with them. You have to try not to dress down the ones who speak English but rather to reason with them and to do so in front of their peers so that you can explain matters without lecturing them. This is part of a cultural appropriation framework that has just been made public. It is a pan-Canadian document.

As we said at the outset, language learning is intimately related to culture. Language and culture therefore go together. Teachers must stop criticizing students in immersion and French as a first language for their skills and use of the language. Students must be empowered to a much greater degree. As we have seen, the reverse does not work. Use empowerment. Let them speak and talk to each other about how to do things. They can do that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Galipeau.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Ms. Hughes, you have the floor.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Paul, when you appeared before the Standing Committee on Official Languages on November 22, 2011, you recommended to us that there be greater accountability for the transfer payments made by the federal government to the provinces and territories for education, both for French as a second language and for French as a first language.

You also mentioned that in your remarks today, in the section on funding. That is your second recommendation. Do you have any suggestions to make to us on accountability so that we can pass them on to Canadian Heritage and to the government? I would like to have a few more details on what would work best.

Mr. Roger Paul: Thank you for your question.

I am pleased to note that you see my ideas are consistent from one presentation to the next.

We are relying on a study conducted by the firm of Heenan Blaikie. Mr. Mark Power, Assistant Professor in the Common Law Section of the Faculty of Law at the University of Ottawa, tells us that the best way to ensure greater accountability for cash transfers, even with regard to French as a first language and French as a second language, is to go through the people in the best position to do something about it.

We told you a little earlier that, in some instances, school board representatives in several provinces are not even invited to discuss their needs with Canadian Heritage. They go through their ministry of education. What is subsequently said? Feedback is requested in some cases, but it is often not done at that level.

Mr. Power tells us that there is no legal barrier to the involvement of school boards, school commissions and school districts because they are another order of government recognized by section 23. They could do just as well, if not better, and would be more accountable.

Even though education is a provincial jurisdiction, there is nothing to prevent school boards from being involved much more directly and even negotiating directly with the school boards. There are already numerous examples of that. Canadian Heritage is already doing this with the communities and on health.

• (1700)

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Could you send us some examples of that?

Mr. Roger Paul: Yes, absolutely.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: That would be good.

Mr. Roger Paul: I also want to suggest that you read this article, which runs to about 85 pages. When someone refers to an article, I expect it to be 4 or 5 pages, but this one is 85 pages long. It makes for very interesting bedtime reading.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: We are starting to get used to reading documents with a lot of pages.

Since I married an anglophone, we wondered whether our children would attend French-language schools. My two children

went to a French-language primary school. However, my daughter had problems and we asked for help because we were told she was nearly failing. As we could not afford to get help for her, when the time came for her to go to high school, she went to an English-language school. I thought she would do better, but that was not the case. It was really the same situation. I should have left her in French school.

The CBC broadcast a good story not that long ago. This is exactly what it showed. Young people who have learning problems are encouraged to leave the francophone system because it is thought they would do better in the English-language system. I wonder whether that is your case. Do you have that in your schools?

My son is at Laurentian University in Sudbury. He wanted to study in French, but the more specialized the courses are, the less they are offered in French. I think that may also play an important role.

Mr. Roger Paul: Our third recommendation concerns the continuum. If parents and students in immersion and French as a first language do not see postsecondary opportunities, they will be more reluctant.

I would even go further. Where do we lose our students who leave French-language schools and possibly immersion schools? As was just confirmed for us, we mainly lose them in the transition years. We do a good job with them in junior kindergarten, kindergarten and grade 1. However, immediately after that, the parents in both systems decide that French junior kindergarten, kindergarten or grade 1 were not serious enough when their children were younger because they spent their time playing. Now that school has become a serious matter, they will have to focus on one language.

There are all kinds of falsehoods. I said this earlier. At the risk of repeating myself, when it comes to language learning, why do we have so many problems with learning two languages, when people in other countries learn three, four or five languages? To answer your question directly, the emphasis must absolutely be on services from start to finish, which obviously includes the secondary and postsecondary levels.

The Chair: All right.

Thank you, Ms. Hughes.

Mr. Maddix and Mr. Paul, I believe you have to leave. We will continue our meeting with Mr. Nault and Mr. Corbeil for another 30 minutes.

Mr. Roger Paul: We wanted to apologize at the outset. As the meeting was supposed to start at 3:30 p.m., we thought we had an hour and a half, but that was unfortunately not the case.

The Chair: That is not a problem. Thank you for coming and testifying before the committee.

Mr. Chisu, you have the floor.

[English]

Mr. Corneliu Chisu (Pickering—Scarborough East, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I was listening with great attention and pleasure to the presentation on the statistical side. Before I begin, I would like to point out that Statistics Canada does not have information to measure access to these programs, their capacity, waiting lists or best practices. These are essential elements, because how you interpret the data is influenced by many other factors that affect the conclusions you draw from the statistical analysis.

I'm an engineer, and for that I'm telling you that statistics are very important. But if you don't have all the elements of the problem, you will not be able to resolve the problem. This is making me question something.

We have the students who are learning French, and from the data you presented they are dropping out at a certain age and their level of French is going down, but what about the teachers? What about the statistics on the teachers and how these correlate with the drop-out rates and the maintenance of the French language, and so on? Can you answer this?

• (1705)

Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil: I might ask for the help of my colleague, François Nault, who has been director of the Centre for Education Statistics. But to answer your question, we need to know where these data come from, how they are collected, and who actually asked us to collect that information.

Maybe I can ask my colleague just to mention where these data come from. These are administrative data. In order to better understand what you're mentioning, we would need to do a survey. In this case, obviously we would need to get funding, and have partners who have an interest in collecting that type of information.

Mr. François Nault: I can only agree with the fact that the more data, the better the analysis. As Jean-Pierre is mentioning, we are working in partnership with the provinces and their ministries of education to get data about students, and also about teachers. It's a real challenge sometimes to get standard data that can be compared from one province to the other, but that's another debate.

The question is one of trying to work together with the province to get all of that information. I don't know. Currently, we share with you what we have. There has been lots of discussion in the past about other data that can help us understand what is going on, but at this point that's what we get from the province.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: But you are sharing these data or getting the data from the provinces. How are you interpreting these data with the objective of having a fully bilingual country? One province is doing it this way, the other province is doing it that way, but you are a statistician, you are a professional, so you need to extract the data, the real data, from the noise, like we are extracting the signal from the noise. If you are seeing only the statistics, this can give you the wrong information and put you on the wrong path. So what I'm asking from you, as a professional in this field, is to guide us and give us some recommendations on how you interpret the statistics and how we can improve, or what we can do to make this country really bilingual.

Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil: I will answer your question by giving an example.

In 2006 we conducted a post-censal survey on official language minorities. It was a very detailed survey, the objective of which was, really, to understand the various dimensions that contribute to the vitality of official language minorities. We had five very detailed modules on education, so it was possible for us to ask parents why they chose to send their children to different schools and what obstacles, hurdles, or problems they faced.

That information was available for official language minorities. But there was an interest, way back when, in developing and conducting that survey. You have to understand that most surveys StatsCan conducts are funded through partnerships with the different ministries and departments of the federal government.

My point is that yes, of course, it would be possible to run such a survey to better understand the hurdles, the obstacles, the objectives, and the challenges. The only thing we can really do right now is use the data available, be it from the census, from the national household survey, or from administrative data collected through the provinces and territories, to get a better understanding of what's going on.

But you're totally right: we would need to run such a survey.

• (1710)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Corbeil and Mr. Chisu.

Madame Moore.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Corbeil, I would like to ask you some questions about statistics.

First, is it possible to extract the data by regional geographic zones in provinces other than Quebec? For example, we agree that the situation experienced in Dubreuilville, Ontario, is not entirely the same as that in Toronto. Is it therefore possible to extract the data based on smaller geographic areas?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil: That depends on the nature of the data. Perhaps I can let my colleague answer your question.

Mr. François Nault: I do not think it can be done with the data we have. The ministries of education send us aggregated data on the number of students attending immersion schools. However, I do not believe we have infraprovincial details. Consequently, we are limited from the standpoint of the data gathered by Statistics Canada.

Ms. Christine Moore: Consequently, for example, we cannot know whether certain geographic areas perform better as a result of social or environmental factors or whether the situation is better in the rural regions than the urban areas for a number of reasons?

Mr. François Nault: That depends on the data. With the census data we can measure English-French bilingualism rates by region and correlate the size of the French-speaking population with French-language retention or the bilingualism rate, for example.

Ms. Christine Moore: Is it possible to structure the data more by geographic area?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil: That would be a project in itself, but it is possible. For example, Statistics Canada's website contains information on small municipalities. For the National Household Survey, that depends on geographic regions.

Ms. Christine Moore: All right.

So you are saying, roughly speaking, that these data do not exist. So we would have to find them ourselves.

Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil: Bilingualism rates can be obtained for the various geographic units in Canada. However, if you want to take the analysis further, to try to understand the factors influencing or associated with higher or lower rates, you have to go further and conduct specific analyses based on the available data.

Ms. Christine Moore: With regard to variations in enrolments in regular second language learning programs, have any causal relationships been established based on certain data to explain what has happened?

For example, we see that there is a constant increase in the percentages in Alberta. Has anyone checked to see whether that increase is associated, for example, with growth in the number of immigrants whose second language is French, since they come from African countries that were colonized by France?

Can we establish any causal relationships between certain factors? Ultimately, have any measures really been put in place to improve the performance of certain provinces? If so, we would be interested in hearing about them. Is that increase simply related to social or geographic circumstances?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil: That is an excellent question.

For your information, the data on interprovincial migration and mobility will be available on June 26. Of course, the reason why we are seeing this kind of growth in British Columbia and Alberta is certainly not unrelated to the migration of Quebeckers to those provinces.

That is not all. That is not necessarily the full explanation, but the population make-up and factors such as migration and international immigration of course have a role to play and can help us explain those factors. Further analysis would therefore have to be conducted.

Ms. Christine Moore: In other words, we are currently unable to determine with any certainty whether the increase is due to good practices or simply to social or environmental phenomena.

• (1715)

Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil: That is correct.

For your information, approximately 15% of children who have at least one francophone parent are enrolled in immersion programs. We therefore clearly have information on the composition and total number of students enrolled. However, we would also have to know, over time, to what extent the fact that certain students could have attended minority schools but instead attend immersion schools influences the increase or decrease in the number of students enrolled in immersion programs.

Ms. Christine Moore: Have any qualitative statistical analyses been conducted to determine why parents choose French immersion schools for their children? If so, is it for the quality of the program or because one parent is a francophone or immigrant?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil: The information is available for official language minorities. Earlier I mentioned the Survey on the Vitality of Official-Language Minorities, which was conducted in 2006, and in which we asked those kinds of questions. Unfortunately, we do not have that information on the entire population for which French is not the first official language spoken. Those types of questions were never put to other people, at least for statistical purposes.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Bateman, you have the floor.

Ms. Joyce Bateman (Winnipeg South Centre, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to our witnesses who are being heard on these issues.

Mr. Corbeil, my questions will also concern your data.

If I correctly understood the presentation of your colleagues who have left us, I believe that immersion programs are completely different from the programs given in the French-language schools.

Students who attend a French-language school—and this is of course the case in Manitoba—must have a francophone parent who speaks very good French. Is that correct?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil: The parent is not necessarily required to speak very good French.

Under section 23, the parent—

Ms. Joyce Bateman: Yes, but the parent must be francophone.

Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil: Yes. The parent must be francophone.

Ms. Joyce Bateman: It seems to me that one of the programs is an orange and the other an apple and that you have mixed up the two in your data.

It is very important for us to develop other programs in order to increase Canada's immersion capacity. I very much respect the program intended for French-language schools, but there are also immersion programs. Where in your data is the information solely concerning immersion programs and the information solely concerning programs reserved for students from francophone families?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil: Thank you for your question.

To clarify—

Ms. Joyce Bateman: That is necessary not for the translation, but for—

[*English*]

Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil: I can use English, if you want.

Ms. Joyce Bateman: No, no, no, I just have to hear it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil: The information that I conveyed to you in our remarks concerns only immersion programs. It does not concern minority schools, that is to say those considered to be French-language schools.

Ms. Joyce Bateman: You are talking about minority schools?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil: These are minority programs, French-language schools where everything is done in French, including management.

Ms. Joyce Bateman: So we are really comparing apples and oranges.

Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil: That is correct, but I do not have to address that issue since the objective was really to focus on immersion programs.

I can tell you that the 2011 statistics we currently have show that approximately 148,000 students attend French-language schools. You must understand that immersion programs are offered in English-language schools, whereas minority programs are offered in French-language schools.

• (1720)

Ms. Joyce Bateman: So do the data you are presenting here concern the second language?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil: These data concern immersion schools. In other words, these are English-language schools that offer French-language immersion programs.

Ms. Joyce Bateman: So you did not take into account the programs of the Division scolaire franco-manitobaine, the DSFM.

However, your colleagues talked about French-language schools in their presentations. Consequently, students attending French-language schools are not included in your data.

Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil: They are not counted, since this—

Ms. Joyce Bateman: They are not counted?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil: Since the committee meeting was to focus essentially on immersion programs, I did not present any data on the French schools.

Every year, Statistics Canada publishes a document in which we provide and distinguish data on enrolments by province. However, data on immersion programs and French-language school programs are published separately for each of the provinces.

In response to the point you raised regarding Manitoba, I can tell you that 5,236 students in that province were enrolled in the public program at a French-language school in 2011. We are not talking about an immersion program here, but rather about a French-language school.

Ms. Joyce Bateman: That is not your data here, but you have—

Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil: If you wish, we can easily send you that information. It is available on the Statistics Canada's website and provides statistics for the past five years.

Ms. Joyce Bateman: Mr. Chair, it seems to me that that data would be very useful for our studies, because this is another—

The Chair: Ms. Bateman, I want to mention that Ms. Lecomte constantly uses the Statistics Canada website to document our study.

Mr. Dionne Labelle, you have the floor.

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will address three points.

Mr. Corbeil, have the changes made to the latest census form helped your services develop a picture of the situation?

Have all the communities been taken into account in the demolinguistic picture that you put together in the last census?

Did you have all the data at your disposal? Did the form change deprive you of any essential data?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil: Thank you for your question.

We have to agree on what the expression "demolinguistic picture" means. If the goal is to paint a picture at a very specific geographic level, the census provides us with that information. It gathers data on the evolution of bilingualism, enrolments, the percentages of mother tongue populations, language use and populations for which English and French are the first official language spoken.

The first results of the National Household Survey, which were published on May 8, provided various data other than linguistic data. In addition to linguistic data, on June 26, we will be publishing data on language of work, education and level of education, industry, occupation and place of work. Of course, certain geographic challenges are involved in this, and there could potentially be some problems for small geographic regions.

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: Let me make myself clearer.

Could data that used to be gathered but is no longer being gathered be of use to you?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil: Once again, that depends on the geographic level.

When we published on May 8, we mentioned that the data were considered to be of good quality for the provinces, the national level and the major metropolitan areas.

Of course, we noted that more than 1,100 small municipalities would not have that information as a result of non-response rates that were too high and related problems.

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: All right, thank you.

I want to go back to what our friends from the school boards said about rights holders.

Does Statistics Canada have any data on rights holders and on those who do not exercise their rights? Do you have that in your documents?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil: We managed for the first time to measure the parent rights holders phenomenon accurately in the Survey on the Vitality of Official-Language Minorities in 2006.

In the past, we had essentially used estimates based on census data on mother tongue, since that is one of the three important criteria. However, in the Survey on the Vitality of Official-Language Minorities, we asked questions on the three factors set out in section 23 of the charter.

We determined from those data, which date back to fall 2006, that 53% of parent rights holders outside Quebec chose to send their children to a minority school, that 15% decided to enrol their children in an immersion program and that the others chose to send their children to an English-language school. We took the survey a little further and asked those parents whether they would have sent their children to a minority school if they had had the choice. Forty percent of those parents said they would have done it had that been possible. Among the reasons given—

• (1725)

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: Wait, I am having trouble following you.

You say that 47% of francophone parents who had the right to send their children to French-language schools sent them to English-language schools.

Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil: Exactly.

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: And that, of that 47%, 43% would have preferred to send them to French school if they had been offered that opportunity.

Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil: In fact, they cited all kinds of reasons

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: All right.

Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil: —in particular supply, availability, distance and program quality.

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: All right.

Let us do a little prospective work.

We are seeing each other again in 15 years. In the meantime, things have remained the same, current trends have remained constant. What would you tell us about bilingualism in Canada?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dionne Labelle.

Mr. Corbeil, you have the floor.

Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil: That is a good question.

Of course, we can see some very strong trends. As I have mentioned several times, some challenges are associated with the changes in population composition. The larger proportion of immigrants moving toward English outside Quebec is a factor in this regard.

However, Statistics Canada has microsimulation models, and it would be possible to use them, based on all the parameters that have an impact on the evolution of the situation, to determine what the situation would be in 20 or 30 years. That exercise has been done in the case of visible minorities, immigrant populations and workforces.

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: Who makes that kind of request to you?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil: It is usually departments.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. O'Toole, you have the floor.

Mr. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to our witnesses for their presentations.

[*English*]

I know you said at the outset that you did not have access to data to measure access issues, waiting lists, and some of the things we have heard about. I'm struck by the apparent correlation between the 27% increase in immersion and the 24% decrease in regular French. I know you don't have any empirical data to directly correlate the two.

Does this lead you to suspect that they're directly related and that a rise in immersion in a lot of the provinces has led to this? Is there any input from what Ms. Bateman suggested regarding the rise in pure French schools for children of francophone parents? I'd like to hear your comments.

Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil: That's a very good question.

It's not easy. Obviously, we have to investigate. We don't really have the data to support this, but I think we've heard many times that there are a lot of parents who consider learning French as a real asset, as a great tool. They consider going through these immersion programs as really beneficial. On the other hand, attending a program of regular French as a second language might pose some challenges, or there might be some issues with retention.

I don't know if some parents who could have thought of sending their children to the regular program chose instead to send them to the immersion program. We do know that people who attended these programs, and who were enrolled in these immersion programs, as parents developed the attitude that it was very important for their children and the children in their communities to attend these programs.

We see it really clearly. We know that more females attend or are enrolled in immersion programs than males. When we look at some of the surveys, we see that women are far more likely than men to say that it is very important for their children to attend these programs. In fact, we don't really have all the information regarding the correlation between the two, but we do know that overall, those who went through the immersion programs are more likely to send their own children to the immersion programs.

• (1730)

The Chair: Merci. Thank you.

This meeting is adjourned.

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