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—
Chair

The Honourable Denis Paradis

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• (0835)

[Translation]

The Chair (Hon. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.)):
We will now begin.

I would like to say first how pleased we are to be here with you in Vancouver this morning, the day after the budget. We will certainly have the opportunity to discuss it as well.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3), we are studying access to early childhood services in the minority language.

We are pleased to welcome this morning Ms. Marie-France Lapierre and Mr. Marc-André Ouellette, from the Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique; Mr. Yvon Laberge and Ms. Isabelle Thibault, from Educacentre College; Ms. Marie-Pierre Lavoie and Ms. Marie-Andrée Asselin, from the Fédération des parents francophones de Colombie-Britannique; Ms. Maryse Beaujeau Weppenaar, Executive Director of Réseau-Femmes Colombie-Britannique; and Ms. Jocelyne Ky, from the Tartine et Chocolat Daycare and Preschool.

Welcome everyone.

I will have to be quite strict with speaking time. Each organization will have five minutes for their presentation. We will have to stick to that to make sure everyone has their turn. We do not come to Vancouver very often and we have an extremely full schedule today. Please do not go over the five minutes you are allowed. That way, we will have time for discussion afterwards, during the question and comments period that will include the members of the committee.

Let us begin right away with the Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique.

Please go ahead, Ms. Lapierre.

Ms. Marie-France Lapierre (Chair, Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique): Thank you.

So I have five minutes. I apologize to the interpreters in advance.

The Chair: As the clerk mentioned, please speak at a reasonable pace to spare the interpreters. Just because you only have five minutes, that does not mean you have to race through your presentation.

Ms. Marie-France Lapierre: Okay, I will try to be careful.

Hello, Mr. Chair, dear MPs, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you very much for this opportunity to appear before you today on behalf of

the Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique, the CSF.

Your committee knows full well how important it is to recruit children right from infancy in order to enhance the vitality of our minority community. Your committee has also discussed and studied the importance of early childhood to our community on numerous occasions. Through the work you did in 2012 and 2016, and also through the work of the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages in 2005 and 2017, you have been able to identify the structural problems that require permanent solutions. We appreciate the work you have done.

These problems will not be resolved by another action plan or protocol alone. Funding is absolutely necessary, but it is not enough to protect our community's rights. That is why we humbly propose a permanent solution to the major problems you have identified, in the form of amendments to the Official Languages Act.

In our presentation, Marc-André and I will talk about the CSF's experience with our early childhood education program, for four-year-olds. This experience confirms what the literature in the social sciences tells us. Early childhood education directly affects children's development, and in particular the development of children from minority communities. That is also discussed in our brief. Finally, we will talk about the multilateral early learning and child care framework and the solutions we propose to tackle the challenges related to education and early childhood.

To begin, I will describe our pilot project for four-year-olds, which is federally funded.

Launched in 2013, the project is designed to better prepare students for kindergarten, both linguistically and culturally. As part of this project, we developed a new program to offer new classes for four-year-olds.

To help you understand the impact and scope of this project, let me first provide some background information.

Since it was founded, the CSF has experienced strong and steady growth, with the number of students rising from 1,750 initially to over 6,000 students today, while the majority of the province's other school boards have seen a drop in enrolment.

The profile of British Columbia's francophone community is much more complex, however, than its school enrolment might suggest. The rate of linguistic and cultural exogamy is very high, and the province has one of the highest rates of assimilation in the country.

In response these challenges and with hard work, the CSF began offering classes for four-year-olds in the cities of Kelowna, Mission, Chilliwack, and Rossland. Table 2 on page 7 of our brief shows the number of children enrolled in these programs in the two years they have been offered. All but one of the students in the pilot project enrolled in kindergarten the next year. That is a quite a triumph for the CSF. The results of the program for four-year-olds are in table 3 on page 9 of the brief. Their results are better than those of children who did not begin school until kindergarten, at roughly 5 years of age. The results are impressive, but far from surprising in light of the scientific and academic research on the subject.

You can appreciate why the CSF would like to extend the pilot project to more schools. To do that, additional funding will of course be needed. The province does not fund initiatives for children under the age of 5.

The success of the pilot project is not an accident. The social sciences research clearly demonstrates that early childhood education is fundamental for a child's development, even more so for children from minority communities.

Mr. Marc-André Ouellette (Vice-Chair, Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique): I would like to go back to the multilateral early learning and child care framework.

Regardless of its terms, the framework does not offer either support or permanent protection for French-language education in early childhood.

You probably know that the CSF, the Fédération des parents francophones de Colombie-Britannique, and a number of co-applicant parents urged the Supreme Court of British Columbia to conclude that section 23 of the charter confers a right to early childhood services, which of course it refused to do. The court did, however, draw three promising conclusions with regard to early childhood, which we summarize in our brief.

The modest gains achieved before the courts in the area of early childhood underline the importance of the multilateral early learning and child care framework for the future of French. The framework provides close to \$400 million annually for three years. However, our communities' needs are not a priority in this framework. There are only two references to obligations relating to language, and these are far from being prescriptive. On page 13 of our brief, you will find these two excerpts from the framework. Here are the two references in question: “[...] recognize the unique needs of French and English linguistic minority communities [...]”; and secondly, under the heading of inclusive services: “[...] Number of children benefiting from programs and/or a number of programs designed to serve children from diverse populations, which could include but is not limited to children from French and English linguistic minority communities [...]”. That is it.

Forgive me for doubting that British Columbia will in fact consider our needs in implementing this framework. Consider for instance that British Columbia is the only province that still does not have a policy on French-language services. I can only relate my experience with the province, which I have been fighting for over 20 years for French-language education.

By way of illustration, I can also mention the Canada—British Columbia agreement that was signed on February 23, 2018. Under this agreement, British Columbia earmarks 1.5% of its budget for bursaries for French-language early childhood educators. That is rather laughable amount. It is...

● (0840)

The Chair: I will have to interrupt you to stick to the time limit for each group. You may comment further, however, when you answer questions from the committee members.

We will now turn it over to Educacentre College, represented by Mr. Yvon Laberge and Ms. Isabelle Thibault.

Mr. Yvon Laberge (President, Educacentre College): Thank you.

Hello, Mr. Chair, honourable members, dear colleagues, and observers.

On behalf of the Educacentre College board of directors, thank you for the invitation. My name is Yvon Laberge and I am the President of Educacentre College. I am pleased to introduce Ms. Isabelle Thibault, our Director of Studies.

Our presentation is divided into three main parts. First, we will discuss the importance of early childhood services in the development of francophone communities in British Columbia. Then we will talk about Educacentre College, and more specifically about the early childhood services we offer. We will then present our chief findings, recommendations, and conclusions.

Your topic of discussion, access to early childhood services in French, is very important if not essential to the development of the francophone community in British Columbia. Educacentre College does not offer services directly to children. True to our mission, we offer accredited training and professional development workshops for early childhood education workers. Our objective is thus to continually improve the quality of French-language daycare services.

Early childhood services are an essential part in the continuum of lifelong learning. We recognize that the early years of life are essential to the positive development of children. Our focus is on developing children's basic skills and, in view of the specific needs emerging in the francophone minority community, developing language skills and identity-building from the time of birth are crucial.

In view of the considerable increase in enrolment in francophone programs from kindergarten to grade 12, as well as the shortage of daycare centres and certified workers, Educacentre College contributes to the provision of quality services by training early childhood workers.

Ms. Isabelle Thibault (Director of Studies, Educacentre College): A non-profit organization since 1992, Educacentre College was granted the status of a private college by the British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education in December 2015, and at the same time received the education quality assurance seal. Since then, Educacentre College has been able to offer its own certificates and degrees, whereas in the past it had to issue them in partnership with recognized institutions. Further, we are the only French-language college in British Columbia.

In order to reach francophones and francophiles throughout the province, our courses, programs, and services are offered in a classroom setting at one of three campuses, in Vancouver, Prince George, and Victoria. In 2016, we added a satellite campus in Surrey. All college programs are also offered remotely through our virtual campus.

The college offers a certificate and a degree in early childhood studies. Its accredited programs are intended for people who want to qualify to meet the needs of children aged 0 to 5 and with special needs. In British Columbia, the profession is governed by the Early Childhood Education Registry, which establishes a skills profile for early childhood workers and ensures that each institution follows it.

As to the students in our programs, the majority are part-time students who take an average of three years to obtain a certificate and one more year for a degree. On average, our clients are between the ages of 35 and 40, and they are mostly mothers from twenty or so different countries.

There are many institutions that offer the same programs as we do, but in English. The majority of students in those programs are young and can afford to go to school full time so they can get into the labour market more quickly. As the only institution offering the training in French, we face different problems than the English-language institutions do.

Currently, we offer our early childhood programs in collaboration with an English-language college, Northern Lights College. The francophone students are enrolled in that college and obtain a certificate or degree that is jointly awarded by Educacentre College and Northern Lights College. The latter also has copyright over its programs.

Although Northern Lights College is an excellent partner, this situation presents some unique problems. First of all, Northern Lights College oversees tuition fees, which are nearly twice as high as ours. Further, it is difficult to suggest changes to the content, registration process, and admission criteria.

One of our college's greatest strengths is its ability to respond quickly to the specific needs of the francophone community and to work closely with its community partners. As you can see, however, this partnership limits our ability to respond. If we ran our own program, we would be able to implement strategies to better serve our unique clientele.

To address this situation, the college would need to develop its own program and to have it approved by the Early Childhood Education Registry. Designing a program costs about \$200,000 and the college does not have access to funding or the budget for program development.

In addition to early childhood college programs, the college also offers the following non-accredited programs: basic family literacy training, which seeks to improve the skills of those working in francophone minority communities; training that provides an introduction to family daycare centres, which helps participants start up their own daycare; Red Cross first aid certification for children; webinars on topics related to early childhood; training at the annual meeting of the Association francophone des éducatrices et éducateurs de la petite enfance de la Colombie-Britannique.

With insufficient funding, however, we are limited in our ability to offer these various types of training. As a result, they are only offered when financially viable.

● (0845)

Mr. Yvon Laberge: Collège Educacentre recognizes that the institutions and organizations that offer French-language services and training in British Columbia are generally underfunded. Colleges are still poor cousins in terms of funding from the province. In order to meet the growing demand for the training and services our colleges offers, a major increase in funding is needed. This additional funding could be invested in initiatives such as program development, awarding bursaries, or establishing partnerships.

In conclusion, Collège Educacentre makes an essential contribution to access to early childhood services in French, to quality French as a second language programs, and to the development of the French fact in British Columbia. Greater political and financial support from the federal government and living up to its official languages obligations would help Collège Educacentre meet its medium and long-term objectives.

We will be very pleased to answer your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Laberge and Ms. Thibault.

I will now give the floor to Ms. Marie-Pierre Lavoie and Ms. Marie-Andrée Asselin, from the Fédération des parents francophones de Colombie-Britannique.

Please go ahead, Ms. Lavoie.

Ms. Marie-Pierre Lavoie (President, Fédération des parents francophones de Colombie-Britannique): Mr. Chair and dear MPs, on behalf of the Fédération des parents francophones de Colombie-Britannique, thank you for coming here to study access to early childhood services in French. I am very pleased to be here today and to talk to you about this subject, which is so dear to my heart.

The Fédération des parents francophones de Colombie-Britannique has been active in education since it was established, in 1979. It represents the parents of the roughly 20,000 children who have the right to French-language primary and secondary education, here in British Columbia.

Our federation brings together 47 associations of parents, 32 associations of parents who are active in the Conseil francophone de la Colombie-Britannique, and 15 associations of parents who manage a preschool, whether a daycare or preschool centre, that offers a program in French.

The federation's mission is to gather, represent, support, and empower parents in their role as primary educators and to foster their commitment to and participation in creating a lively and exemplary francophone community. The federation pursues this mission by supporting parents and informing them about the choices available to them, and about recommended behaviours to foster optimum development of their children's French language skills and francophone identity. The federation also assists and informs groups of parents who volunteer at French-language schools or who start up or manage preschool centres.

Since its inception, the federation has demanded the specific legal guarantees that are necessary for the establishment of a high-quality and accessible French-language education system throughout British Columbia. Further, it has actively contributed to the establishment of this system. This long-term undertaking led to the creation of the CSF in 1996, which is responsible for managing the French-language education system, from kindergarten to grade 12, throughout the province. The student populations at our schools have grown steadily since then, year after year. We are especially proud that the CSF now has over 6,000 students.

This success can be attributed to the concerted efforts of parents, the community, and school administrators, but also to those of preschool centres, which for the most part are located within French-language schools. The vast majority of French-language daycare and preschool centres in British Columbia are run by non-profit organizations, most of them parents' associations, which rely on the fees paid by the parents who use them for their operations.

For over 20 years, the early childhood sector has been an essential component of French-language education. Access to French-language education in British Columbia does of course require a network of schools that provide instruction in French as a first language to eligible children and to those whose parents want to enrol them.

That being said, French-language education must be with a wide lens. It starts in early childhood with the infants who attend daycare centres, then the toddlers and preschoolers, and so on all the way to the post-secondary level. The entire continuum of minority-language education should in fact have constitutional guarantees.

Through their educational program that focuses on developing oral French skills, French-language daycare and preschool centres are excellent tools for the francization of our children and thereby help prepare them for French-language school. These programs have a huge impact on the children's sense of belonging to the community and help build their identity. Early childhood is a direct gateway to kindergarten. Preschool and daycare services are essential for our communities because they support parents in their role of passing on the French language and culture to their children.

It seems in fact that these findings are no longer challenged. Experts in child development, sociolinguists, the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages, and your committee have all recognized, officially and publicly, in various reports and studies, that access to French-language early childhood services is crucial to the vitality and development of our francophone minority communities, in

particular because this access helps pass on the language and culture to new generations.

Your committee recognized the importance of this access in 2012, in your report entitled "After the Roadmap: Toward Better Programs and Service Delivery". The members of the committee who are here today recognized this again in 2016, in your report entitled "Toward a New Action Plan for Official Languages and Building New Momentum for Immigration in Francophone Minority Communities".

• (0850)

The Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages underscored how important early childhood education was for our communities' development, and has been calling on the federal government to take action in the area since 2005. The problems in early childhood development have, nonetheless, remained the same. For example, demand for French-language preschool infrastructure continues to outstrip supply by a wide margin. If we go by Statistics Canada figures—which are flawed owing to the systematic under-coverage of rights holders under section 23 of the charter—the province has approximately 4,000 children aged four and under whose first language learned is French. However, just 450 preschool spaces exist, roughly equivalent to 113 spots per child cohort.

To give you some context, I should point out that, this year, more than 650 students are enrolled in CSFCB kindergarten programs. That means that some 500 students currently enrolled in kindergarten did not have access to French-language day care. This indicates that British Columbia would need at least 2,600 additional day care spaces—in other words, 650 multiplied by four—if we assume that children spend the first year of their lives at home with a parent. I said "at least" because, as you know, Statistics Canada data prevents us from knowing the true number of rights holders under section 23. How can we plan early childhood services without knowing how many children under the age of five there are?

Turning now to human resources, I would note that our communities are harder hit by the province-wide shortage of early childhood educators, given that our community vitality depends on access to French-language early childhood services.

Collège Éducacentre plays a key role in training this workforce but, on its own, lacks the capacity to train the number of French-speaking early childhood educators needed.

These problems all stem from the lack of financial support for early childhood development and are well-known to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development. They are having dire consequences on the French transmission rate among children with one French-speaking parent.

• (0855)

The Chair: Ms. Lavoie, I'm going to have to stop you there. You can make your remaining points during the question and answer period with members.

We have a limited amount of time, so we have to move on to Maryse Beaujeau Weppenaar.

Ms. Maryse Beaujeau Weppenaar (Executive director, Réseau-Femmes Colombie-Britannique): Good morning, Mr. Chair.

Ladies and gentlemen, members of the committee, thank you for inviting me today.

Réseau-Femmes Colombie-Britannique represents francophone women across the province, advocating on their behalf and contributing to their economic, social, and cultural development.

British Columbia's network of preschool centres lacks enough adequate and affordable spaces. British Columbia's day care costs are the second-highest in the country, after Ontario. In 2015, the average cost of day care in the Vancouver area was \$1,225, and the cost could even be as high as \$2,000. For a two-parent family with two children, day care accounts, on average, for 23% of household spending, second only to housing.

According to the Greater Vancouver Board of Trade, the high cost of day care, combined with the shortage of spaces, is preventing many young parents between the ages of 24 and 34 from returning to work, creating serious challenges for employers, who are struggling to find workers.

More than a third of families looking for a day care space have to wait at least six months. The wait is even longer in the case of infants and toddlers aged 18 months or younger. Too often, families are forced to put their children in unlicensed day cares, which means they have not been inspected or deemed to be in compliance with provincial safety standards. Only 18% of all children 12 years of age or younger attend a licensed day care facility. Some home-based day care providers end up having to leave the city of Vancouver and provide their services elsewhere owing to the high cost of housing.

The cost of day care almost inevitably prevents women from having economic independence. Faced with a shortage of day care spaces and the high cost of available spaces, most families have only one choice: the lower income earner has to stay home with the child until they turn five. The wage gap between men and women usually means that the mother is the one who leaves the workforce. This so-called choice has a negative impact on women's careers, professional development, and retirement. Although paternal leave is available, it is not a benefit employers adequately recognize. Employers are not favourable to an employee taking an extended absence. Being in a position of economic dependence can expose women to social or physical risk, even violence. This can affect the child's development, as well as their physical and mental health.

A 2011 study cited by Justice Canada pegged the cost of spousal violence at an estimated \$6.9 billion, with women and third parties, in other words, children, bearing \$4.6 billion of that cost.

Numerous mothers and expecting mothers in Réseau-Femmes Colombie-Britannique groups share stories of the challenges they experience because of the lack of choice of early child care services. Complicating the situation is the fact that much of British Columbia's francophone community is made up of migrants and immigrants. With no guidance or family support, these women become further isolated, and their mental and physical health suffers

as a result. Hence, the ability to function in their mother tongue in a safe environment is all the more important for these women.

Nearly 1,500 people take part in activities organized by Réseau-Femmes Colombie-Britannique groups every year. Some members of the francophone mothers of Vancouver and British Columbia discussion group post similar stories. They find themselves faced with a choice of either not migrating or immigrating to British Columbia, or leaving the province as soon as the family has a second child.

The affordable day care shortage is an economic issue further complicated by the exponential cost of housing in regions of British Columbia where work is available. This undermines the successful integration of migrant and immigrant families. The problem is even more pressing in the case of single-parent families. Some families have even waited until the child turned five before immigrating to British Columbia. I encourage you to watch the documentary *Femmes debout*, by Marie Ka, about three single francophone mothers who immigrated to British Columbia.

Mother-to-child transmission of a mother tongue accounts for 80% of acquisition, but the child's non-home environment also plays a crucial role from a very young age. There is a critical threshold for language acquisition: young bilingual children must be exposed to the language 30% of the time in order to solidify that learning. That 30% is roughly equivalent to 28 hours a week.

According to a report on early childhood development, by the Institute of Medicine and the National Research Council of the United States, the capacity to learn a language is optimal from the 34th week of pregnancy until the age of 12 months, during the period when the brain synapses are forming. The best way to become bilingual is to learn both languages from birth. The optimal time to learn a second language is until the age of six or seven, although some researchers claim it is until the age of four. That does not mean it is impossible to become bilingual later in life, however.

It is essential to have a strong community that can support French-language learning, one that is conducive to both families and children's socialization.

● (0900)

For the past two years, the Fédération des parents francophones de Colombie-Britannique and Réseau-Femmes Colombie-Britannique, in partnership with RésoSanté Colombie-Britannique, have been working on the CAFE program. CAFE is the go-to gateway for information, resources, and activities specifically designed for Vancouver's francophone families with children up to the age of six. The CAFE initiative is intended to support parents and their young children by embracing diversity, and delivering a range of programs and services in the areas of health, education, and early childhood development. It provides parents with resources to equip them for their role as their child's first educators, giving them information on available early childhood development services, including preschool centres, and promoting activities and opportunities for them to have fun with their children in French while meeting other parents.

CAFE's approach is to encourage francophone communities to work together to ensure families have access to the services essential to their young children's health, well-being, and development.

The CAFE initiative is part of the B.C. Early Years Centres network. For more information on the network and the province's early childhood development strategy, I encourage you to visit their websites.

The success of the CAFE initiative and the *Franc départ* program demonstrates how necessary these services are in providing families with emotional and social support, as well as language development support. Fostering an environment conducive to language development hinges on early childhood development infrastructure and the provision of family-oriented services. The CAFE initiative is available only in the greater Vancouver area. There is, however, an overwhelming need for the program across the Réseau-Femmes Colombie-Britannique communities.

In short, to meet early childhood development needs in the minority language, developing community infrastructure is paramount. Clearly, that starts with relieving the pressure on existing schools by building more infrastructure and encouraging the development of the francophone community through a significant boost in financial and human resources.

Even though French is only the ninth most spoken language in British Columbia, it remains an official language whose status confers rights. Therefore, the protective measures and actions worthy of that status must be taken.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We now turn to Jocelyne Ky, from Tartine et Chocolat Daycare.

Ms. Jocelyne Ky (Director, Tartine et Chocolat Daycare and Preschool): Mr. Chair, members of the committee, ladies and gentlemen, good morning.

I would like to begin by thanking the committee for its interest in minority-community early childhood services. It is a subject I care deeply about.

As the mother of two young adults raised in British Columbia and an early childhood educator, I have, both personally and professionally, watched the development of French-language early childhood education over the past 20 years. I would like to tell you about my personal experience, which is similar to that of many exogamous families in Vancouver and other parts of the province.

In 1992, Vancouver had no French-language early childhood education to speak of. My children had to attend preschool in English. Without access to any supports, the decision to send my children to French-language school presented a real dilemma. Nevertheless, I decided to enrol them in French-language school, so it was not until they turned five that my children realized that French was a living language. They learned French but never really identified with francophone culture, and today, they do not consider themselves French-speaking Canadians but, rather, francophile English-speaking Canadians.

That is why I strongly believe that French-language preschool services are of paramount importance. Identity is formed at a very young age, and it is a common responsibility to support minority-community families in building their children's identity. My personal experience has shown me that, alone, we cannot successfully pass on our language and culture to our children.

Turning to my work life, I should point out that I am a qualified educator with 20 years of experience. I joined the Tartine et Chocolat Daycare when it opened in 2009. Our day care is an incorporated not-for-profit organization managed by an association of volunteer parents, with the support of the Fédération des parents francophones de Colombie-Britannique.

Tartine et Chocolat provides French-language day care for children aged 3 to 5, preparing them for French elementary school. Our centre is open year-round, from eight o'clock in the morning to 5:30 in the afternoon.

The day care is located in an old portable in École Anne-Hébert's schoolyard. The French-language school board provides the space for free, but we pay the upkeep and maintenance costs. Our day care has 16 full-time spaces and has been operating at full capacity since it opened. Our waiting list is long, and the demand is growing steadily. The preschool centres located in the board's schools are limited by the space available in the school.

Most of the families we accommodate are exogamous families from culturally diverse backgrounds. Often isolated, the French-speaking parent faces the challenge of bringing French into the family and supporting its acquisition. Over the past 20 years, by dint of perseverance, programs for young children have been developed, including the *Franc départ* program, which provide such important community support. However, most parents work full time and are desperately searching for French-language early childhood education through day cares so that they can keep their jobs. When children have the opportunity to be in a French-language day care setting up to the age of five, they arrive in kindergarten with a good command of the language and a high degree of self-assurance in their francophone identity.

Unfortunately, despite studies on the subject and their definitive results, the challenges and ongoing lack of resources limit the work that can be done. French-language early childhood centres face systemic challenges and urgent needs that threaten their survival.

First, early childhood services in British Columbia, especially Vancouver, face a dire shortage of suitable, stable spaces to meet their clients' needs. In January 2017, we and two preschool services received a letter from the French school board indicating that we would be evicted if solutions could not be found in the near term to accommodate the schools' growing student populations. Despite a short-term solution, we have been operating since then under the certain knowledge that our day care will have to find other accommodations or close its doors.

The only service of its kind in east Vancouver, our day care lacks the logistical and financial support to deal with this situation. We have a severe shortage of qualified French-speaking employees to fill educator positions because of the complexity of the interprovincial credential recognition process, particularly between Quebec and British Columbia. What's more, salaries do not reflect the cost of living. Owing to the shortage of qualified staff, employees often have to work in demanding and sometimes unacceptable conditions. Staff have few or no benefits, no group health insurance plan, and no pension plan, and as a result, the occupation receives little recognition and the early childhood field is not very attractive.

It is frustrating not to be able to accommodate francophone families that have a child with special needs. For example, the building has not been modified to meet the child's mobility needs. We do not have enough qualified French-speaking support staff, and specialized organizations provide service in English only. I have seen a number of families, discouraged by the lack of available services, switch to the English-language education system as a result.

• (0905)

In conclusion, despite the challenges, the network of preschool centres continues to grow, with compelling progress and positive results achieved in recent years. We expect our federal government to deliver the support and resources needed to provide the assistance and development to which French-speaking Canadians are entitled, so that future generations can also have the same sense of pride.

I thank you for the opportunity afforded me today to share my experience as an educator and a mother, as part of your efforts to identify meaningful solutions in the French-language early childhood field.

• (0910)

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

Thank you all for your wonderful presentations.

I apologize for having to rush some of you, given our limited time.

We will now move into the question and comments portion of the meeting. I will ask the committee members to please say their names, and state where they are from and which party they belong to. That way, everyone will know a little bit about who they are speaking with.

Let's start with Mrs. Boucher.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Good morning. My name is Sylvie Boucher, and I am a Conservative MP. I am from the greater Quebec City area, and I represent the riding of Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix.

Under the Harper government, I was the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages and, for nearly four years, Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women. While I come from Quebec, I have always cared deeply about the French language. The first time I was given responsibilities in connection with official languages, I didn't really understand why. In Quebec, as you know, you don't hear much about francophones outside the province, and I'm not afraid to admit that. When I raised my daughters, I would tell them about all the francophones who

lived outside Quebec and were probably struggling with the same challenges we faced, if not bigger ones.

That said, I'm very glad to be back on the Standing Committee on Official Languages. This is a wonderful committee. Having sat on many committees, I can tell you that the members of this committee work very well together since the French language is not defined by any political allegiance. If, however, this morning, the Liberals claim to be the sole defenders of official languages, I may have to say something.

There you have it. I've told you all about me, as instructed.

I listened to you carefully, and I'd like to clear up a few rumours. Is it true that British Columbia does not recognize francophones as a minority language community?

The Chair: Kindly specify who the question is for.

It appears that Mr. Ouellette would care to answer.

The floor is yours, Mr. Ouellette.

Mr. Marc-André Ouellette: That's an excellent question.

In the last throne speech, the new government underscored the importance of early childhood development, which is a good thing. However, neither the budget nor the throne speech made the slightest mention of the francophone community, and even less so of French-language early childhood development in minority communities.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: In other words, the Liberals prioritized early childhood development without distinguishing between francophones and anglophones. Do I understand that correctly?

Mr. Marc-André Ouellette: That's exactly right.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I see.

Now I have a question for Isabelle Thibault.

You said Collège Éducacentre did not have access to funding. Could you please explain why?

Mr. Yvon Laberge: As the person in charge of our organization's finances, I'll answer that, if I may.

The funding we receive for college training comes exclusively from bilateral education agreements. The province contributes nothing. We are trying to fix that.

Your first question is a very important one. The situation is so challenging because francophones are not recognized as a group deserving of additional funding for the provision of services.

We are a non-profit organization. We manage our own funds. To a certain degree, the funds we raise, in a variety of ways, merely help to make up the shortfall. In other words, they represent the funding the government should be providing.

The Chair: Ms. Lapierre, you may add something, if you like, but I would just remind everyone that committee members have only six minutes each.

Please make it quick, Ms. Lapierre.

Ms. Marie-France Lapierre: You asked whether the province supported us, so I just wanted to make clear that this is the only province in the country without an agreement on French-language services.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Your province is the only one that has no agreement with the federal government. Is that what you're saying?

• (0915)

Ms. Marie-France Lapierre: With the provincial government. That was in response to your first question.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: My goodness. Is this 2018, or what?

Now I have a more general question. I'm not sure who should answer, perhaps the day care centre representatives. On average, what is the group size and employee-to-child ratio in your province's or school board's day care centres?

Mrs. Marie-Andrée Asselin (Managing Director, Fédération des parents francophones de Colombie-Britannique): I'll answer that, if I may.

Our federation is taking advantage of your being here today to release a study on French-language day care in British Columbia. You'll find the report in our brief, at tab A. Towards the end of the report, in appendix B, you'll find a list of all the day care centres in the province, along with the number of children in each group, and the maximum number of children allowed under the centre's operating licence.

The main report contains the ratios for each age group. It really depends on the age group. In the case of infants, the ratio is four to one. For slightly older children, it can be up to 12 children per educator. As you can see, then, these are small groups.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Asselin.

It is now Mr. Samson's turn.

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you all very much for being here today. It's a real pleasure to meet with you.

I want to begin by congratulating you on the outstanding work you do on the ground. Without you, progress would be even harder to achieve than it has been so far.

In your statements, you had already proposed some solutions.

I heard—

The Chair: Mr. Samson, before you go any further, I think you should tell us which part of the country you represent, first.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Yes.

My name is Darrell Samson. I am now a politician, but my professional background is as an educator. I went from working on the ground to making decisions in a new arena. I am Nova Scotia's only Acadian representative, so I see my role as extremely important not just for Nova Scotia, but also at the national level. At one time, I held the key position of president of the Regroupement national des directions générales de l'éducation.

You put forward a number of proposals, suggesting an early childhood development policy and highlighting the importance of a new Official Languages Act. Those are probably the two key ingredients for guaranteed success.

I'd like to pick up on the work done by the CSF. I have only six minutes, so we'll really have to keep things rolling. Actually, I have just four minutes left now.

How many years have you been waiting for land on which to build a school in British Columbia? Please answer clearly so that everyone can hear you.

Mr. Marc-André Ouellette: It's been more than 15 years, nearly 17 years now.

Mr. Darrell Samson: As far as section 23 of the charter goes, we have long been enumerating children for the purposes of subsection 23(1). However, we have not been assuming our responsibilities under subsection 23(3).

Do you think it would make a big difference if we were to do so?

Ms. Marie-France Lapierre: Yes, 100%. In fact, we made that very recommendation to the Senate committee. We could forward you a copy. We proposed that the Official Languages Act be amended to include the necessity of enumerating all rights holders. In order to open schools and day care centres, you have to know where those children are. The current census methodology makes that impossible, so we recommended that the short form questionnaire be amended to enumerate all rights holders under section 23 of the charter.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you very much for your efforts. They have certainly stimulated and fuelled our discussions in Ottawa. Your work is very important.

My next question is for all the witnesses.

Are you aware that the federal government established a new Canada-wide multilateral agreement and is in the process of signing bilateral agreements with the provinces on early childhood development?

In fact, it is the first time in Canadian history that a provision for francophones has been included. It means that provincial governments other than Quebec's can no longer disregard French-language day care and early childhood education in minority communities. I don't think British Columbia has signed the agreement yet, but I do know that five or six provinces have. It's a major step.

Would anyone like to comment quickly on that?

• (0920)

Ms. Marie-Pierre Lavoie: The agreement with our province was actually signed last week. It's a nice agreement, but we are concerned that the consultations may not have been adequate. That's what we are calling on you to address. What's more, transparency is lacking. We'd like a modernized act to include a standing provision requiring provinces and territories to take action in that regard.

Mr. Darrell Samson: You just confirmed that Canada and British Columbia have signed the early childhood development agreement, which actually contains a provision that guarantees investments in francophone minority communities.

Ms. Marie-Pierre Lavoie: It does not provide any set amounts.

Mr. Darrell Samson: It does not set out specific amounts, but you have to start somewhere.

Since we're short on time, I'm going to move on to another question. This one is for the Collège Éducacentre representatives.

Do you know whether any other Canadian universities offer early childhood development programs? If so, do you think they would be willing to share them? For instance, Université Sainte-Anne and Université de Moncton have programs with practical components.

Mr. Yvon Laberge: Thank you for the question. If I may, however, I'd like to comment on the question before.

We help people re-enter the workforce. Although the bilateral agreements contain language clauses, we have found that their implementation does not support development in the true sense. My concern is inadequate implementation. I don't want to speak for the representatives of the Fédération des parents francophones de Colombie-Britannique, but I think they share that concern.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I respect that, but without the clauses, it would be impossible to implement them. Now, all of us, together, have to find ways to use the strategy.

Let's talk budget for a moment. This is a feminist budget with many measures that support women. You made an important point. Women used to stay home, and when those women were francophones, they helped to advance the francophone cause by sending their children to French-language schools. The measures in the budget may throw the situation a bit off balance.

Do you have any thoughts on the budget? Have you had a chance to look at it?

Ms. Maryse Beaujeau Weppenaar: It doesn't contain any details. It provides leave for new fathers, a benefit for families, not necessarily women.

From a gender-based analysis standpoint, this is a very positive budget. It's the first time we've seen a budget like this. Now, the focus will be on how it's implemented, enforced, and, above all—

Mr. Darrell Samson: Unfortunately, I'm out of time.

Thank you for all your hard work.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Samson.

Mr. Choquette, it is now your turn.

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you all for being here today.

My name is François Choquette, and I represent the riding of Drummond, in the Centre-du-Québec region. I am a member of the NDP. I'll leave it at that since we already know each other fairly well.

Early childhood development is so important. As you said, you see and feel the impact it has on our communities' vitality every single day. The problems you're having here, in British Columbia, are even more extensive and complicated than they are elsewhere in the country, and something has to be done.

We've had two roadmaps on official languages. Early childhood development was covered in the first, but disappeared from the second. We hope that, under the next action plan, early childhood development will be a priority, as we've called for.

As I listen to you describe your circumstances, I realize just how challenging things are for you. As you mentioned, because of section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, you don't really have any rights when it comes to early childhood development. You'd like us to fix that problem when the Official Languages Act is amended.

Can you comment briefly on that?

• (0925)

Ms. Marie-France Lapierre: We have a proposal for an amended Official Languages Act. We could send it to you. Yes, action plans, protocol agreements, and multilateral frameworks are all necessary, but they aren't enough. We have a proposed amendment to the act. Of course, it's a first draft. On pages 16 and 17 of the French version of our brief, you will find a proposed amendment to the Official Languages Act to make sure that early childhood development is covered. We'll send it to you in a letter. We are proposing changes to the act with respect to the census, to make sure the census takes all of us into account.

Mr. François Choquette: You mentioned another problem, one I would say is more serious. Of course, we discussed the enumeration of rights holders, which poses a problem. The Standing Committee on Official Languages is trying to rectify that problem to ensure that the next census enumerates all rights holders so that you can inform your provincial government of your true needs. That is essential. There is nevertheless an even bigger problem, and I don't quite know how to refer to it. It revolves around infrastructure. It's a problem all over the country, but is even more acute in British Columbia.

What can the federal government do to help you improve your infrastructure, especially with respect to early childhood development? You said your day care centre was located in an old school portable. That is unacceptable. What can the federal government do to improve things?

Mrs. Marie-Andrée Asselin: We would really like to see permanent solutions adopted at the federal level. It would be good to include early childhood in particular in the new roadmap for official languages, and to make it an important file, a strategic axis, like immigration and health, which are also important for the francophone community. In that way, we could access budgets or infrastructure. When new francophone schools are built, some square footage should be reserved not only for kindergarten to grade 12, but also for early childhood. We need day cares in our schools for children from 0 to 5 years of age. That is what we want. Anything that can facilitate access to that type of funding would be positive.

The vast majority of our preschool centres are in old portable structures behind the schools. When those structures need to be replaced, easier access to investments in infrastructure is needed.

The Chair: Ms. Lapierre, you may add something quickly.

Ms. Marie-France Lapierre: I'd like to add a few words to everything that has been said.

We would like to be protected, no matter which party forms the government. That is why we are asking for changes to the act.

On page 17 of our brief, in point 43.2(b), we talk about the importance of the role of councillors and minority school boards in this regard. I will send you the other amendment suggestion we made. Our objective is to have the federal level give us first choice when it gets rid of a site, so that we may have schools that are big enough, and day care services.

As we have all said, early childhood services are essential to our culture and to the development of our language, and not taking this into account is dangerous.

Mr. François Choquette: At this time it is really a problem to build new French-language schools, or even to renovate existing ones. As for the land, there is a particular reality here. According to what I understand, the school boards had not planned to have early childhood spaces in the schools.

• (0930)

Ms. Marie-France Lapierre: Regarding new school construction, the province gives us Neighbourhood Learning Centres. We then have appropriate funds, and we ask the parents what they want to do. Generally, they want day cares, in order to build the community from the crib up, as Ms. Lavoie said.

Mr. François Choquette: We won't have time to address the shortage of educators.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Arseneault, you have the floor.

Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Good morning, everyone. I thank you sincerely for having responded to our call and for being here.

I am also an Acadian MP, but I am from New Brunswick. I am proud to be an Acadian member of Parliament, just as I am also very proud to be a Canadian. I was going to say “but”; however, these two realities are not mutually exclusive. The members of the Acadian community are proud to be a part of a linguistic minority and to be citizens of this country, but they nevertheless face some challenges.

I am a lawyer by training. I dedicated my entire life both to my career as a lawyer and to organizations that defend, protect and promote language rights. I am also a member of the Association des juristes d'expression française du Nouveau-Brunswick. Flanked by an army of volunteers, such as yourselves, on the ground, I work so that the community may live and thrive in French daily. Thank you very much for being here.

Before asking my questions, I would like to say that I am part of a superb committee. Our committee discusses language issues that affect both anglophones in minority situations in Quebec, and francophones in minority situations outside Quebec. We have big ears, we listen and we draft a lot of reports. If you have the opportunity of coming to see us at work in Ottawa, you will see that we are very effective.

Our committee is quite dynamic. We have—and they are quite rare among federal MPs—four francophone members from outside Quebec, one Franco-Ontarian member, and members from Quebec. There is one missing because we lacked the necessary budgets, but we understand the reality on the ground perfectly, as Mrs. Boucher said at the outset, and we are extremely sensitive to it.

If you have questions that have not been answered completely, please send them in writing to the clerk. What you say to us constitutes evidence, and we need it to draft our reports. We cannot make use of what we do not hear or do not read. So, if you want to obtain answers to questions, or additional replies to some of them, please send us your comments in writing. Let me reiterate that these constitute evidentiary elements for us that help us to prepare our reports.

Mr. Choquette raised an important issue, and Mr. Samson spoke about the enumeration of rights holders. I am going to raise something else.

How are francophones distributed throughout British Columbia? Is the French-speaking community concentrated here, or is it dispersed north and south?

Ms. Marie-Pierre Lavoie: The francophone community is dispersed; there is no real concentration in specific regions. Francophones are present throughout the province.

Mr. René Arseneault: Fine.

Are there any locations where the number of francophones is greater than elsewhere in the province?

Ms. Marie-Pierre Lavoie: Yes, Victoria and Vancouver.

Mr. René Arseneault: What is the percentage of francophones who have settled in Victoria and Vancouver?

Ms. Marie-Pierre Lavoie: Fifty per cent.

Mr. René Arseneault: So, it is difficult to help, target or manage the francophone population in a very large province. Correct?

Ms. Marie-Pierre Lavoie: Yes.

Mr. René Arseneault: How do you set your priorities? Among all of the points that were raised this morning, is there one that needs to be tackled immediately?

Ms. Marie-Pierre Lavoie: The Official Languages Act needs to be changed to include permanent provisions and get certain things back. We also need capital assets.

Mr. René Arseneault: Yes. On the ground today, what is the most pressing need?

Ms. Marie-Pierre Lavoie: The one that relates to capital assets.

Mr. René Arseneault: Have you quantified your needs in this regard for the Government of British Columbia? Did you put that on paper?

Ms. Marie-Pierre Lavoie: Yes. That is in the study we released today. In fact, we went to court to make our case.

Mr. Marc-André Ouellette: We and the CSF challenged this aspect of the issue before the courts several years ago, and this has yet to be settled.

Mr. René Arseneault: Why has it not yet been settled?

Mr. Marc-André Ouellette: We appealed the decision.

The matter is in fact related to the census. The judge based her decision on the data provided by the census, period. The problem is that francophone students are not all included. Since the judge only had partial data, she considered that we were not entitled to certain things.

● (0935)

The Chair: Let me say that when we return to Ottawa, we will be hearing representatives from Statistics Canada; they will be among the first witnesses we will be hearing on this topic.

Mr. René Arseneault: Believe me, we are focused on the enumeration issue. I'd like to hear everything you can tell us on that at this time. It's important to us.

Ms. Lapierre, did you want to add a comment?

Ms. Marie-France Lapierre: Earlier you asked about the distribution of francophones in the province. I simply want to say that at a meeting of our board of directors last week, we learned that we had received four requests asking for new schools to be opened in the province. Clearly we cannot open four schools at the same time. If the census provided more data, we could determine where the needs are greatest. So that is really important for us.

Mr. René Arseneault: Fine.

Mrs. Asselin, did you want to add a few words?

Mrs. Marie-Andrée Asselin: We are talking about amending the structure, that is to say including permanent legislative measures so that the province does not forget about us. For instance, in 2014 the province offered a lot of funding to open new day care spaces, but up till now, only two projects involved francophones. Why? Because there is no provision to provide funds directly to francophones. We always have to proceed via calls for tender. Then we are on the same footing as anglophones, and our respective projects compete. If our francophone community needs a day care for infants, for instance, and the province gives priority to day cares for children from 3 to 4 years of age in a more anglophone region, our project will be denied because it does not fit into the province's action plan.

If the Official Languages Act were modernized and included a permanent provision reflecting the importance given to early childhood, the funds allocated by the province to that end could really be used to meet francophone needs. This would mean that we would not have to compete with the rest of the population.

The Chair: Forgive me for interrupting you.

Mr. Dan Vandal now has the floor.

Mr. Dan Vandal (Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, Lib.): Thank you.

My name is Daniel Vandal and I represent the riding of Saint-Boniface—Saint-Vital in the city of Winnipeg. I believe we met on a few other occasions. I grew up in a village outside Winnipeg, and my first language was French. When I moved to Winnipeg, I could not speak English, believe it or not. Twelve years later, I could no longer speak French; I never went to a French-language school.

However, when I went into public life, I began to speak French again. I had the good fortune of being able to build on what I had acquired. I simply needed to continue speaking French in order to improve. My children grew up in French. So, that is my story.

Ms. Lavoie, as you know we signed bilateral agreements. Friday, on behalf of the minister, I announced that an agreement had been concluded with Manitoba. I believe that British Columbia announced the signing of a similar agreement on the same day.

What do you think about these bilateral agreements? What could we do better in future?

Ms. Marie-Pierre Lavoie: The bilateral agreement focuses particular attention on the shortage of early childhood educators, and that is essential. That is one of the things we lack. However, it does not mention capital assets and infrastructure. Nor does it plan for the creation of new spaces for francophones specifically. That is what we need the most.

Mr. Dan Vandal: I see.

Do the Conseil scolaire francophone representatives have something else to add?

Mr. Marc-André Ouellette: I would like to support what Ms. Lavoie said. We are being offered very little in this agreement. On the one hand, the 1.5% investment for the training of educators is calculated on the basis of population data, but we see on the other hand that the assimilation rate is higher. And so, the investment calculations need to take more criteria into account if we want to train more early childhood educators.

● (0940)

Mr. Dan Vandal: It's 1.5%...

Mr. Marc-André Ouellette: It is 1.5% of the \$153 million allocated to training educators.

To answer Mr. Samson's question, we are being offered free translation of this agreement. Bravo! We are making great progress! I can't get over it!

That is what they are offering us. The officials will provide a brief information session to tell us about what they will be providing—that is not a consultation about our needs.

Mr. Darrell Samson: You are talking about the province.

Mr. Marc-André Ouellette: Yes, the province. The federal government took a step ahead, and we thank it very much.

I'd like to go back to the point Mrs. Boucher raised earlier. Political affiliations do not matter when we talk about the French language. However, there are governments that do more than others to preserve it.

We are off on the right foot and there is good energy. However, as Mr. Samson said earlier, we need to work together.

If you were not here, in British Columbia, we would not be here either. That is how it works.

Ms. Marie-France Lapierre: That is why we have to change the law.

Mr. Marc-André Ouellette: Indeed.

Adding a provision to the act about early childhood education would represent great progress.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Mr. Laberge, did you have something to add?

Mr. Yvon Laberge: I would simply like to support what has been said concerning the need to train early childhood educators.

It is all well and good to provide more spaces, but if the people who provide the services are not competent, the quality of the language may suffer, and we will not reach the objectives we have set for ourselves.

That said, insofar as infrastructure is concerned, we are talking about creating businesses, but in a collegial way. We don't have any physical locations aside from premises we continually have to rent. I will give you an example. We just left a campus we had been on for over 20 years. During those 20 years, we invested approximately \$6 million in rent. That money could have been used in other ways, for instance to improve the program and that type of service. Currently, we are continuing to rent all of the spaces we occupy, and I can tell you that it is expensive.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Ms. Ky, what is the average annual salary for people who work in day cares?

Ms. Jocelyne Ky: At this time, a qualified educator earns \$17 an hour, on average. A director earns \$22 an hour, median wage.

Here is what happens. These are often non-profit centres. Each centre is managed by small volunteer parent associations. Often there are no pension plans, and there is really nothing attractive about the profession. We ask a lot from the educators; they often work long hours, in difficult conditions, without any real compensation. So these jobs are not really attractive.

What I have seen over the past few years is that not only do we have trouble recruiting new educators, but also many of them leave the profession.

They work between three and five years in the profession, and then they leave because it's not worth it.

The Chair: We will continue with Mr. G n reux.

Mr. Bernard G n reux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivi re-du-Loup, CPC): My name is Bernard G n reux, and I am the member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivi re-du-Loup, in the Lower St. Lawrence region, close to Quebec City.

Thank you very much for being here this morning.

I will not repeat everything that was said, but I want to join Mr. Samson in congratulating you for the work you do on a daily basis to advance the cause of French in the province of British Columbia.

In light of some of the figures mentioned this morning, we must recognize that you have done extraordinary work moving things forward despite the conditions you must work in. Given those conditions and with the means at your disposal, having gone from 1,700 students to 6,000 is fantastic.

I'd like to ask a question, and perhaps Ms. Lapierre could answer it.

If I am not mistaken, according to the federal-provincial report, certain sums are allocated to education throughout Canada through agreements that already exist. I'm not talking about new laws or new agreements but about what is already in place. British Columbia receives money from the federal government to teach French.

How is it that the disbursement of that money is not clearly tracked using existing accountability rules? Do you get the impression that this money is given to British Columbia, but is not distributed as it should be?

● (0945)

Mr. Marc-Andr  Ouellette: You must be talking about the Official Languages in Education Program, the OLEP.

Thanks to the OLEP, the province receives about \$6 million a year for education. Out of this amount, the CSF receives approximately \$4,433,000.

Mr. Bernard G n reux: So that is about 70%.

Mr. Marc-Andr  Ouellette: Not even.

The national average is about 60-40, when you deduct costs. It is about 60% for the first language and 40% for the second one. In British Columbia, you can invert those numbers because for one reason or another we are not included.

Mr. Bernard G n reux: I see.

And does the province provide any explanation for that?

Mr. Marc-Andr  Ouellette: No. We ask for explanations, but we are not given any.

Ms. Marie-France Lapierre: I should specify, at the risk of repeating myself, that one of the proposals we made regarding changes to the act consisted in increasing transparency as to the destination of these funds. I don't know if people from the federation submitted proposals to the Senate committee. Be that as it may, they would be included in their brief.

One of the problems we deal with is that we don't really know where the money that is supposed to be for us goes. The province wants us to say that its contribution is equal to that of the federal government. In fact, that is required by the law, by the agreement. For the four-year pilot project, the province told us to answer that it had also given us \$800,000. So that is what we wrote down, but those people did not give us any funding. This is not even included in the Ministry of Education master plan. This really has to be brought to light; these people have to show some transparency and insofar as possible be accountable to the federal level.

Mr. Bernard G n reux: I think everyone here has dealings with Canadian Heritage.

What is your relationship with that department, specifically?

Please be very open; I am not looking to blame anyone.

Do you think that Canadian Heritage programs as a whole facilitate things?

Could improvements be made?

It is important to say so now.

Mrs. Asselin, you have the floor.

Mrs. Marie-Andrée Asselin: We have a good relationship with Canadian Heritage. The help the department provides to the minority francophone community is of course very important. However, insofar as early childhood is concerned, nothing is permanent. The whole topic of early childhood was almost completely eliminated from the last roadmap. This was a big impediment to the federation and to the network of early childhood centres in the province.

About 10 centres opened their doors between 2002 and 2013, but no others have been created since, because we don't have the necessary funding to increase the number of centres. We need permanent provisions in order to be able to really focus on early childhood and make it a strategic axis of the plan, a battle horse. All of that has to be written down in black and white in the act, much like the provisions on health. Early childhood is too important; it can't just be eliminated like that.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Ms. Ky, I really appreciated what you had to say. I married an anglophone myself, and we live in an almost entirely francophone environment. I sometimes joke that my wife is the only anglophone in my riding. We raised our children in both languages, and they are perfectly bilingual today. They have passed on this value to their own children. Although we live in antipodean geographical areas, it is possible to learn the other language in minority milieus. You were saying earlier that your children do not consider themselves bilingual, but anglophone.

Do they have children today, or are they still teenagers?

Ms. Jocelyne Ky: No, they don't have children yet. They are 25 and 26.

What I see—and many share my experience—is that not only are we bilingual, but we are also trilingual. A large number of families speak three languages at home. English is the common language that allows us to communicate with one another. My husband speaks another language.

In addition, families are often very isolated. We may be the only francophone parent in the community, and we have no family nearby. The children look at us in a somewhat perplexed manner. We speak to them in French and it's a bit discouraging, because there's no community support. At least that was the case at the time. There was absolutely none.

• (0950)

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Has the situation changed since?

Ms. Jocelyne Ky: It is starting to change. Over the past years, a lot of work was done in co-operation with the Fédération des parents francophones de Colombie-Britannique. We now have, for instance, the Franc départ program. We see a change. But we have to continue to support and develop it. These are the very first steps. I would say that over the past 20 years, it has been during the past five that we have begun to see a change.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Ky.

I now yield the floor to Mr. Choquette.

Mr. François Choquette: We began by talking about the shortage of qualified teachers. If I am not mistaken, a shortage of educators is

a problem in British Columbia. What solutions are there? Do we need immigration? Do we have exchange programs with France? In the past, I have been asked to make it easier for teachers to come from France to work in our schools. What are the solutions in the short and medium terms? There are short-term solutions, of course, but we also have to look at the longer term.

Ms. Isabelle Thibault: What you are mentioning is important because, as you know, education is regulated by the provinces. So it can be very difficult to recruit qualified people, either from France or from other provinces. Qualifications are not automatically recognized; you have to have your records analyzed. Sometimes, teachers' qualifications are not recognized 100% and they have to go back to school. It is very discouraging for them.

The solution would be to offer a provincially recognized program in French and this is what the Educacentre College offers. We chose to offer it by distance education only so that the training would be available for the entire province. But not all of our clients are pleased with that. As I said just now, few CSF students come to us because we do not provide a campus life that might interest them.

If we were masters of our own program, we could be more in tune with our community's needs and provide some flexibility in our range of programs. We could then attract a bigger clientele and better meet their needs. However, that would have to be done with the support of the province because education is in provincial jurisdiction.

Mr. Yvon Laberge: I would like to add something.

In our presentation, we mentioned that, because we do not currently control the program, we have to require the same registration fees as those charged by the English-speaking programs.

About how much does it cost, Ms. Thibault?

• (0955)

Ms. Isabelle Thibault: It costs \$8,000 rather than \$4,000. It's double.

Mr. Yvon Laberge: If we were masters of our own program, we could charge \$4,000 rather than \$8,000. That would be an incentive for low-income people. Training is an investment. If you have to invest \$16,000 to become qualified as an early childhood educator, and you can only hope to earn \$17 or \$20 per hour afterwards, it is easy to do the math.

I want to raise another point to back up what Mr. Généreux said just now about bilateral agreements in education.

I have been the president for eight years. In those eight years, our budget envelope has not increased. If you consider the increase in the cost of living, we are in the hole. The demands increase but we have less money to operate with. At some stage, there will be a tipping point. Before that happens, we have to increase the budgets for the bilateral agreements too.

The Chair: Do you have a quick question, Mr. Choquette?

Mr. François Choquette: You suggested amending the Official Languages Act so that the commitment is greater. How would your suggestion be received by the provinces? It has been said that the provinces want education to continue as their private domain. Have you consulted them? How will they see your proposal to amend the Official Languages Act for education and early childhood?

Mr. Marc-André Ouellette: I hope they will react; that would be something in itself. Up to now, we have been rather ignored. Perhaps, if we prod them a little, they will eventually wake up and see that we exist. Up to now, the signs have not been very positive.

Ms. Marie-France Lapierre: We are fighting the same battles, province by province. We have all made our case in court at one time or another.

Since I have the floor, let me use the opportunity to tell you that I am also from an exogamous family. I began working with the CSF when my son was two years old and I was trying to find a French-speaking daycare. I was working and my husband stayed at home. So the children were learning more English than French, by osmosis. I went to the neighbourhood school, which was located 45 minutes from my house. When I got there, I cried when I saw the state of the school. I knocked on the door and asked what I had to do to start a daycare in that school. They told me that there was no space. When my children were in grade 5 and grade 6, space became available because they had made some changes in technology. I went back with another parent and we set up a daycare. It did me no good because my children were in grade 5 and grade 6 at the time, so they did not need daycare.

We set up a preschool program. The problem we had is that we were not able to keep teachers because of the salaries. Finally, we offered a preschool program three days per week.

It is always a battle, and it is never-ending. There is uncertainty, because we never know whether the money will be available or not. That is why we are asking for the act to be changed. We want the provinces to have some responsibility. Education is in provincial jurisdiction, but preserving our official languages is federal. We all have the obligation, at federal level, to ensure that we are not all assimilated.

Still, the situation is different today. I am really happy that your children can speak both languages, but it must be said that there are many more possibilities to access English content. Anglophones are much less exposed to the danger of being assimilated than francophones. When my children were very little, they presented as anglophones. At some stage, they saw themselves as bilingual. Now that they are teenagers—they will be 15 and 17 next week—they say that they are Franco-British Colombians. It's not a lot, but it's a big success for me.

Voices: Hear, hear!

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

Thank you very much, Mr. Choquette.

Before we finish, Ms. Lapierre, I would like to ask you two other questions. First, what are the basic principles that federal officials use as their basis, in your opinion, when they are negotiating bilateral agreements with the provinces? Second, given the prerogative of the provinces and the linguistic rights of minority

communities, does it seem to you that the balance of power is properly reflected or could we improve the negotiation process? In other words, are our federal officials doing a good job when they are negotiating the bilateral agreements?

Ms. Marie-France Lapierre: I will let you answer for the feds. As for the province, it is supposed to represent us, the francophone school boards. We had a meeting in June with our representative. We were supposed to have a follow-up in December, but we still have not received the answers to our questions. A meeting was supposed to be set for January 15, and it was cancelled again. We are almost in March—isn't it February 28 today?

• (1000)

The Chair: It is February 28.

Ms. Marie-France Lapierre: And we still haven't had any renewals. We tell each other that elected officials, at the federal level, can have the best will in the world, but we have no idea what the province tells them, because we are not consulted. At any rate, I don't consider that we were consulted, so this is one of the problems. No matter what work is being done at the federal level, if the province doesn't show its commitment, if it doesn't listen to what we have to say, it becomes a moot point. It isn't all that useful.

The Chair: Mr. Ouellette, you have the floor.

Mr. Marc-André Ouellette: As long as the negotiations take place in camera, it is hard to answer your question, clearly. Concerning our relationship with our friends at Heritage Canada, it's going very well these days. They're listening to us, but the question remains whether they're understanding us. If so, we will know the answer when they end up recommending provisions so that we can stop having to fight for the same thing for 20 years. We are growing tired.

The Chair: I would like to sincerely thank you, Mr. Ouellette and everyone else, for your presentations.

Voices: Hear, hear!

Mr. Darrell Samson: We could spend all day with them.

The Chair: It was absolutely superb.

We're going to suspend for a few minutes, but I would like you to stay seated so that we can take a group photo with the MPs behind you.

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_____ (Pause) _____

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• (1030)

The Chair: We will resume.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3), we will begin our study of French and English as second-language programs.

I would like to welcome the following witnesses: Damien Hubert, Director of the Alliance Française de Vancouver; Danielle Dalton and Patrick Witwicki, of the Association des francophones et francophiles du Nord-Ouest; Sophie Bergeron, of the Association provinciale des professeurs d'immersion et du programme francophone de Colombie-Britannique; Diane Tijman and Glyn Lewis, from Canadian Parents for French - British Columbia & Yukon; and Gino LeBlanc, Director of the Office of Francophone and Francophile Affairs, Simon Fraser University.

We will proceed like this. You will each have five minutes for your presentations. I will be quite strict in enforcing this five-minute period. We have a pre-determined amount of time, and we want to give the MPs the time to speak and ask questions after your presentations.

After your five-minute presentations, there will be a period during which MPs will ask questions and make comments. They will each have six minutes to speak; they know the rules of our committee. I just want to make sure you do too.

Once more, welcome everyone. We are extremely happy to be here with you in Vancouver today; it is truly a special occasion. We are learning very important things about how the francophones here live, as well as about the people who want to learn French. We would like to hear what you have to say.

I believe that we're starting with Mr. Hubert, right?

• (1035)

Mr. Damien Hubert (Director, Alliance Française de Vancouver): It's your call. No issue here. I would be glad to start things off.

The Chair: You have five minutes.

Mr. Damien Hubert: Very well.

The Alliance Française de Vancouver is a non-profit association whose mission is to promote French language and culture. It was created in Vancouver, in 1904. It is a long-established institution that is still alive today.

Before all else, we are a language school. This is what allows us to sustain ourselves, because we receive no funding from either the provincial or federal government. We are completely financially independent, meaning that the French classes keep the institution operating, pay the teachers' salaries, and create cultural programs, because our vision is to teach the language and bring French culture to life. We have a resource centre that is the largest French library in British Columbia, something that few people are aware of. We also offer a series of cultural activities.

When I say "language school", I'm clearly talking about students enrolled in continuing education, meaning people who want to learn French of their own accord. They range from five-year-old children to ninety-year-old adults, maybe even older; I would have to check. In any case, the will to learn has no age limit.

We currently have approximately 2,500 students per year, which is relatively considerable and allows us to say that Francophiles and Francophones alike share an interest for French. This represents approximately 100,000 hours of classes billed per year, and 5,000 enrolments.

We offer classes in which French is taught as a foreign language. This is a particular way of teaching French that has an action-based approach, meaning that it revolves around interactions, scenarios and communication above all. Our students have the immediate possibility to speak and live in French through everyday activities.

In addition to the teaching component, we also offer cultural resources. If the students are given the possibility of having unique cultural experiences in French, it will be easier for them to integrate, assimilate and understand the language. We organize a little more than 60 events per year. Since the year is at its end, I can give you the numbers. In 2017, we welcomed 1,800 people, including students, Francophiles and Francophones, to our cultural events. The idea is to create opportunities for students and Francophones of all ages to get together and talk with one another, so that they realize that the French language is alive and well in Vancouver and British Columbia. They will also be made aware of the existence of French-language events, and the opportunity to practice speaking French in their everyday lives.

There. I have respected the five-minute speaking period.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Dalton, you have the floor.

Mrs. Danielle Dalton (President, Association des francophones et francophiles du Nord-Ouest): Good morning. I am the president of the Association des francophones et francophiles du Nord-Ouest, or AFFNO for short. Today, Patrick Witwicki will be speaking to you.

• (1040)

Mr. Patrick Witwicki (Executive Director, Association des francophones et francophiles du Nord-Ouest): Thank you, Mr. Chair and distinguished members of the committee.

I am a francophile and the executive director of AFFNO. I am a good example, I believe, of the importance of French immersion. I was in a French immersion program until I graduated.

Today, we had the choice to do our presentation in English or in French, but I decided to do it in French to show you the importance and the success of French second-language programs.

Voices: Hear, hear!

You have all received the chronological presentation that explains what has happened over the last five years in our region with school boards and FSL. Today, I will use the five minutes I have to talk about our unique situation in northwestern British Columbia with respect to the French immersion program, the consultation process between our school boards in the northwest—we have four—and what associations such as ours request from those school boards. I will also look at the conflicts between FSL and indigenous languages and, finally, at the end of my speech, I will present my recommendations to the committee.

First, I will talk about the number one challenge we are facing in the north. We are in a very rural region; there are small towns everywhere, including Terrace, which is the largest with 15,000 residents. In the northwest, we do not have access to the same basic products as in the big cities. In addition, it is difficult to recruit teachers who also speak French to teach in the French immersion program. There is also a problem with waiting lists in places where the program does not exist. It is quite possible that our francophones and francophiles will not get an opportunity to study French at school, which is unfair.

There is also another problem: attrition in high schools. Since they are smaller than those in big cities, there are fewer options in high schools for students. So, there are always conflicts between course choices, and that causes attrition.

The challenges for school boards are primarily the budget and money. Right now, every school board receives funding for education in French, the amounts of which are in our submission. However, only 15% of those amounts can be used for administrative costs, such as salaries.

The same goes for scheduling. Students enrolled in our high schools experience many problems with the scheduling and planning of French immersion courses because of conflicts with other courses. So our number one concern with school boards is apathy.

As we mentioned in our brief, we have been disagreeing with our school boards, except Prince Rupert, for a number of years. Clearly, if school boards had a choice, they would rather not give courses in French. In addition, school boards do no advertising to promote the program. There is therefore a lack of support for students and teachers. I often hear parents and teachers in our area say that they feel abandoned. They feel that the school boards do not want to do anything, and would rather let attrition continue to grow to the point where enrolment numbers are low enough to warrant cancelling the program.

Finally, our situation in the northwest is unique with respect to FSL and indigenous languages. Indigenous languages are taught in schools in almost every city in our region. In Hazelton, for example, the combination of three languages works: every child has the opportunity to learn English, French and Gitanmaax, an indigenous language, and we think that's wonderful.

However, in Haida Gwaii, for example, the local school board, under a lot of pressure from the Haida chiefs, suddenly cancelled the immersion program because people were saying that Haida Gwaii's two official languages were English and Haida.

• (1045)

We want what works in Hazelton everywhere in our area, in the northwest and across Canada.

I know other associations will probably ask for the same thing, but here are our four recommendations to the committee.

First, the funding earmarked for teaching French as a second language and the percentage for administrative costs, which is 15% today, must be increased.

Second, school boards in rural communities should be given additional support to find teachers who speak French to teach French as a second language.

Third, teaching the second official language, French and, where applicable, the indigenous language of the region, should become mandatory and be protected by a constitutional guarantee, with a view to reconciliation.

Finally, fourth, the federal and provincial governments should develop an action plan to address attrition in high schools in remote cities. They should also find ways to support school boards, students, teachers and even parents so that the program can continue and be successful.

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

We will now hear from Diane Tijman.

[English]

Ms. Diane Tijman (President, Canadian Parents for French - British Columbia & Yukon): *Bonjour.*

Good morning, Chair and members of the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

[Translation]

My name is Diane Tijman and I am the president of the British Columbia and Yukon branch of Canadian Parents for French.

First, I would like to sincerely thank the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages for the work that you do for Francophones and Francophiles.

The Chair: I would just like to clarify that this is the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages. We are elected members; this is not the Senate.

Mrs. Diane Tijman: I understand and I apologize. I just meant that the Senate tabled a report last May on Francophone and Francophile programs.

[English]

—It was entitled “Horizon 2018: Toward Stronger Support of French-language Learning in British Columbia”. I think we have to recognize the tremendous amount of work that went into that report. It underscores the serious situation that we have found ourselves in, and the urgent need and call for action.

[Translation]

Yesterday was my birthday, and I received the greatest gift ever. Thanks to the government's announcement, I am much more hopeful today. Thank you.

[English]

However, I couldn't say much had really changed since the Senate report was released last May in British Columbia. In fact, in some locations, access to French language education has, frankly, been worse than it was last year: the most famous case being the Vancouver School Board's closure of five French immersion kindergarten classes, representing one of the greatest disappointments to us as a parent organization seeking and supporting bilingualism.

As president of the CPF B.C.-Yukon branch, I represent 7,000 members belonging to a national network of 25,000 members across Canada, seeking French education and cultural opportunities in French for our children. I personally am a mother of two children who completed the immersion program, and am someone who has worked as a French teacher and as a languages coordinator in Richmond. I benefited from the federal program Explore as a young teacher, and have studied both in Quebec and in France. My experience in French tells me that we are at a critical point in French language education in British Columbia.

Yes, we have much to be proud of, with 5,700 francophones enrolled in school, and 54,000 in French immersion, representing a growth in French immersion programs by about 65% over the last 20 years, and a growth of about 75% in enrolment in our francophone program. Nevertheless, success breeds demand, and for the last few years school boards such as those in Vancouver and Surrey have turned away hundreds of French immersion students' registrations annually. Anecdotally, I heard it was over 400 last year in Vancouver, and in Surrey, 250.

At CPF we hear from the many anxious parents concerned about their child not getting into the program, and for parents of children entering kindergarten immersion, there are very few options. They include waiting until grade 1, when the class size increases by two kids; or maybe waiting until grade 6, when some school districts offer late immersion, where you might get in if you win the lottery. To access the program, some parents might move to another city, commute to deliver their child to a school, or move in with relatives—I've heard—to attend a school that will allow them access. When I was working as a language coordinator in Richmond, I had one desperate parent who actually rented a garage so that she could use the address to obtain registration for her child in the program.

It's true that B.C. offers several options in French. The Conseil scolaire francophone offers an excellent francophone education, but obviously the number of schools is limited at this point, and the challenge of busing children long distances makes some francophone parents place their children in French immersion or even in English. Core French is widely available but frankly, requires added years of study to attain bilingualism. Intensive French is another quality option but is offered in only a handful of districts. Yes, French immersion is widely available, but enrolment is tightly controlled, with school boards placing artificial roadblocks such as enrolment caps, lotteries, and camp-outs, which prevent some children from getting into the program. Such impediments are, frankly, an insult to parents, but they do enable districts to keep a tight lid on enrolment in French. We can speculate on why districts might want to limit growth, but one fact is abundantly clear: we presently have a critical shortage of French teachers.

• (1050)

One other interesting point is that the French immersion program started in British Columbia in the late 1970s and now many of those graduates are becoming parents. They are the great Canadian success story, but to our dismay face enormous challenges in registering their own children in French immersion. As Canadians we celebrate the social and cognitive merits of bilingualism and the skills they bring, yet we provide no guarantee to a French-language education. Yes, the charter provides these rights to francophones, but none that are

guaranteed to francophile, and that's a fundamental gap that I believe needs to be addressed.

Canadian Parents for French appreciates the difficulties school boards face currently. Finding teachers, classroom space, and appropriate resources are not easy and we recommend a multi-pronged approach and offer a few recommendations. And thank you to our dear government for providing the announcement yesterday. But I ask that the government work with our ministry of education on specific targets, including expansion of teacher training programs in French here and across the province; expansion for specialist training for teachers and educational assistants to support inclusion and learning assistance in French; provision of mentoring programs for beginning teachers, and continued professional development in French, including immersion francophone intensive and core French; and expansion of professional development funds to allow teachers to further develop their language skills in pedagogy, as well as cultural understanding.

A market adjustment to teachers' salaries would be most beneficial. We're the second lowest in Canada and that, with the highest cost of living, makes it most difficult to attract teachers from out of province here.

The Chair: I'll have to ask you to continue in answering questions maybe from the members later on.

Ms. Diane Tijman: All right. Thank you.

The Chair: We want to hear from Glyn for a few minutes.

Glyn, go ahead.

[Translation]

Mr. Glyn Lewis (Executive Director, Canadian Parents for French - British Columbia & Yukon): My name is Glyn Lewis, and I am the executive director of the British Columbia and Yukon branch of Canadian Parents for French. I am a product of the French immersion program in Burnaby, a suburb of Vancouver. I will discuss my notes in English because it is a little easier, but if you ask questions in French, I will be able to answer in either French or English.

•(1055)

[English]

I won't reiterate too much of what Diane has said. I think she has given a very good, comprehensive overview of the programs and the situation here in B.C. and the Yukon, but I will add a little bit, and then I will speak more specifically to my own personal experience and how that might relate to the Official Languages Act and any revisions that might be coming, or considerations for revisions.

There is a list of questions that we were presented with before we came. I reviewed them and there are three questions that I really want to focus on and drill down on a little bit more.

The first question was whether the quality of FSL programs meets the expectations of students and their parents. As you can see from Patrick's example, French immersion programs generally are very, very strong. I would say that is the case across Canada, but it's entirely the case here in B.C. and in the Yukon. We have excellent teachers. The program is very immersive. There's a very strong community that supports the program. The goal of French immersion, we always say, is for our graduates to become functionally bilingual by the time they graduate, and I think that is the case for most students who reasonably apply themselves. If you apply yourself a little bit more, I think you become incredibly proficient by the time you graduate.

Where I think there are legitimate concerns and challenges is with core French, core French being basic French. As Diane mentioned, it's a requirement that all students in B.C. take a second language course between grades 5 and 8. By and large the offering of that second language is French, and that's mostly because of incentives that come through federal French funding, but it doesn't have to be French. Students could take Mandarin or Punjabi or some other second language.

The enrolment in core French in B.C. is 180,000 students, so it works out that almost one-third of the entire student population in B.C. learns core French. Unfortunately, we've seen enrolment in core French drop precipitously over the last 20 years, and there is a host of reasons for this. I'll just quickly identify a few that we've seen.

One is the fact that teachers who are teaching core French do not feel comfortable teaching French, and this is consistently shown in studies and in surveys. They, themselves, don't feel comfortable speaking the language. A 2008 study that was done by Wendy Carr at SFU showed that 80% of elementary and middle school core French teachers do not feel comfortable speaking French, so you can only imagine the negative impact that would have on the learning of students or the inspiration of students to develop an affinity for the language and the culture.

The second concern we have with the core French is that, being sometimes isolated from francophone communities and the French language and French culture, you really need to have extracurricular activities to complement what you're learning in the classroom. That's why we have to look at exchange programs and furthering exchange programs and immersive cultural experiences to complement what they're learning in the classroom, to hopefully inspire them to continue to learn the language and to pursue the language. That was the one question I wanted to address.

The second question that I really liked, from the list I was given, was whether there are resources available to help immigrant students who do not have French as their mother tongue or official language spoken to integrate into French second language programs. This was a question about new Canadians and whether there are resources and strategies to help them participate in FSL programs.

By and large I think we have very good, high participation of new Canadians in FSL programs. There is a school in Burnaby where the majority of the families who participate in French immersion do not speak French or English at home, so these are families who would speak mostly Mandarin or Punjabi or some other language. I think generally speaking we see that new Canadians, when they come to Canada, see Canada as a bilingual country—more so, sometimes, than we see that ourselves—and they want their children to be part of this language. They want their children to integrate and to embrace the language and the culture of the place where they have landed and which they are now calling home, so they seek the program.

I think the challenge with those families—and Diane mentioned this in her remarks—is to make sure that we are creating enough space that we don't turn any of those families away. I just want to make that comment with respect to FSL for new Canadians.

The last one—and I am mindful of time—is the question of whether second language instruction should be protected by constitutional guarantees. This is a question that Diane mentioned in her remarks. We are graduates of programs like French immersion, but our children aren't guaranteed the same rights and access to learn French as well.

I live here in Vancouver. I can outline my backstory very quickly. My mom was born in Greece. She went to Paris to become a French teacher. She moved to Vancouver where she met my father who is a sixth-generation Canadian from the west coast. My mom is a multicultural, multilingual, internationalist, and my dad was a meat-and-potatoes, anti-French west coast guy. I have always wondered how they met and how they thought it was a good idea for them to be together.

•(1100)

Mr. Gino LeBlanc: You turned out well.

Mr. Glyn Lewis: Thank you, Gino.

My mom was persistent that both of her kids would learn French even though my dad was indifferent and derisive at times about the French language; again, this is a meat-and-potatoes west coast person. She persisted and I went through the late French immersion program in Burnaby and my sister went through the francophone program in Vancouver. I went to Simon Fraser University and studied chemistry, and I never thought I'd come back to the French language. After I graduated from university, I decided I wanted to live in Montreal. I wanted to see another part of the country, and I wanted to experience another part of the country. It was one of the best things that I did and I had that opportunity because I had French as a background.

When I was living in Montreal, I was invited to come back to work for Canadian Parents for French. I've now spent the last eight years advocating for kids just like me and Patrick so that they can have the same opportunities that have changed our lives.

It seems to me—and Diane mentioned this in her remarks—that the challenge is that because I live in a community like Vancouver, in a few years when I have kids, I will have to line up and I will have to put my name in a lottery to get my kids into these programs. It will be the luck of the draw whether or not they get to participate in the program.

My strongest recommendation for this committee is to recommend that we extend those rights and guarantees to families like Patrick's and mine.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much for this presentation.

[*Translation*]

We will now go to Mr. LeBlanc.

Mr. Gino LeBlanc (Director, Office of Francophone and Francophile Affairs, Simon Fraser University): Good morning, Mr. Chair.

Before I start my five-minute speech, I would like to thank the members of the committee for travelling here to the Franco-Columbian francophonie. I would also like to greet the Clerk of the Committee. We were at the University of Ottawa together a long time ago. We worked together. She has amazing skills. So I imagine that the report she is going to prepare will be excellent.

The Office of Francophone and Francophile Affairs (OFFA) is certainly not well known, but before I talk about it, I would like to say that what you heard this morning must be considered in combination with what you will hear this afternoon. In other words, for French as a second language to exist, there must be a francophone community and vitality. Ms. Tijman, Mr. Lewis and Mr. Witwicki said it, and I say it too: for French as a second language to exist, there must be living francophone communities in British Columbia, western Canada, Acadia and elsewhere. I would not want you to separate the two dynamics, since they come from the same reality.

OFFA is a product of the Dion plan. Mr. Chair will surely remember the Dion plan, made public in 2003. As for the Office of Francophone and Francophile Affairs at Simon Fraser University, it was founded in 2004.

I represent the post-secondary institutions in French, in British Columbia. The University of British Columbia, a sister university of Simon Fraser University, offers courses and trains teachers in French, of course. Political science, history and education are taught in French. This may surprise you, but it has been the case since 2004. In addition, we are rapidly growing. One of the things I would like you to remember, as Ms. Tijman and Mr. Lewis said, is that the demand is there and we are unable to meet it.

It's not as if you came here to evaluate how we spark interest in the French language and the culture. The interest is already there, even for newcomers. It is important to say it. In the minds of the people who come to British Columbia, French plays an important role. However, we cannot meet the demand.

I do not want to say what one group has said before, that money will fix everything and we need more. Actually, one of the key messages I want to convey is that the infrastructure is there. Simon Fraser University has an office, and we received \$1.5 million in 2003 to offer courses in French, in education, political science and history. In addition, we have a French cohort program.

As I was telling Mr. Arseneault, tomorrow morning, I would be ready to start a criminology program entirely in French with about \$300,000. I could hire professors and recruit between 20 and 30 students. The infrastructure is there and the machine is ready to operate, but there are not enough resources. I will not be criticizing the official languages funding in the last 10 years, but I can attest to the significant stagnation of funding.

OFFA is an example, as are the Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique, which appeared before you this morning, community groups such as Canadian Parents for French and the Alliance Française de Vancouver, run by Mr. Hubert. The infrastructure is there. So you are not starting from scratch.

Four hundred million dollars was announced yesterday and \$305 million is allocated to the Department of Canadian Heritage. How will those amounts go to the Official Languages in Education Program (OLEP)? We agree that we will be largely supported by OLEP.

How will the money get here? It is up to you to help us. It is up to you to answer that question. How can we convince the senior officials from the Department of Canadian Heritage that, in British Columbia and even in the west, if we want to have a more Canadian vision of the west, the machine is available.

The Université de Saint-Boniface and the Campus Saint-Jean are ready. Not only are they ready, but the demand is there. Spots in French immersion are awarded through lotteries, and people line up in the rain in Vancouver. That's the message I want to get across this morning. Of course, we can go into the details of how to accomplish this.

I come from Acadia and worked at the Université de Moncton for 15 years. I also worked at Mount Allison University, in Sackville. I saw what was there, but I have discovered a demand for immersion here. It is a dramatic increase. The problem is that, if we don't act quickly, the demand for core French will unfortunately decline, as Mr. Lewis said.

As Ms. Tijman said, today's parents are the products of Mr. Trudeau's vision of Canada's national duality. The time to act is now. If we do not act now, we will find ourselves on a slippery slope.

I will now go back to OFFA and Simon Fraser University. I sort of have my feet in French as a second language, but also in the francophone community. OFFA is a member of the Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne (ACUFC). The teachers I train will end up in immersion schools, just as they will end up in the Conseil scolaire francophone. I experience both those realities, to an extent.

• (1105)

I would like to devote the rest of my time to some more general remarks.

Mr. Lewis concluded by saying that perhaps fundamental rights should be considered for those wanting to learn the second official language. It is one of the questions that you submitted to us, and I say yes. I even think you should rethink the Official Languages Act, as the Senate is doing. It is outdated and we are starting to feel it.

Section 23 of the Charter does not apply to post-secondary education. For me, and for Simon Fraser University, the \$2.1 million that the Department of Canadian Heritage and taxpayers are investing is not protected. There is no guarantee and those funds could disappear tomorrow. I imagine those speaking for early childhood have told you the same thing this morning.

At the Office of Francophone and Francophile Affairs of Simon Fraser University, we are talking about a continuum in education, and post-secondary education is important for us. Teachers need to be trained. That's what we are doing, just like the University of British Columbia and other institutions, but the shortage of teachers is felt.

Let me summarize the situation. I am going to see the Dean of the Faculty of Education to tell him that I will be training 52 teachers in French this year. The training for each of them costs from \$10,000 to \$12,000. Fifty-two teachers, that's the real number, by the way, but I would be able to double it tomorrow. I would need just \$12,000 per additional student, which the province should pay. However, the discussion only goes so far, because neither the province nor the federal government is providing the necessary resources. I guess it's sort of the same situation for the University of British Columbia.

I do not want to limit the debate to the issue of resources alone, but I want to let you know that the infrastructure is already in place. All we have to do is move forward. Once the situation is resolved, we can finally enhance francophone vitality in British Columbia.

I will end on that note, and I am ready to answer any questions you may have.

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

My sincere thanks to all of you for your excellent presentations.

We will continue with our usual round, and I will ask the members of the committee to introduce themselves as we have done with the other groups.

Please state who you are and what we are doing here.

We will start with Sylvie Boucher.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Good morning. My name is Sylvie Boucher and I am a Conservative MP from Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix. I was the parliamentary secretary for official languages and parliamentary secretary for status of women for four years in the former government. That said, I must tell you that our committee is working very hard on official languages and that it is non-partisan. I will leave it at that.

Today, I have learned a great deal from the previous witnesses and yourself, Mr. LeBlanc. We know that the province of British Columbia does not recognize its francophone minority. Regardless of our federal political affiliation, and even with the best intentions in the world, our investments under a federal-provincial agreement will not yield the desired result if the province does not recognize its francophone minority.

You have talked a lot about the funding or the resources you want to get. Unfortunately, education falls under the provinces. The federal government gives money to the provinces, but does not always know how it is spent.

Mr. LeBlanc, if you had to suggest to our committee one way to help you while keeping in mind that education is the responsibility of the provinces, what do you think would be the best recommendation we could have in our report?

• (1110)

Mr. Gino LeBlanc: You raise a very good point, a major problem that reveals your experience in this matter: the accountability of the provinces toward the amounts they receive from the federal government. I'm not prepared to say that the federal investments are yielding no return, but you are right to point out that it is difficult to track and obtain accounts of how the provinces spend the money they receive.

Mr. Lewis and Mrs. Tijman have been in British Columbia longer than me. I just arrived, but I would say that there is still a slight wind of change blowing. I would like to raise an optimistic point. Mr. Dix has been appointed the Minister Responsible for the Francophone Affairs Program in British Columbia. It's a portfolio that doesn't have a big budget, but it's a start. Mr. Fleming, the Minister of Education, shows a certain openness, which still needs work. So, a slight wind of change is blowing.

However, the federal investments do play a big role. I think you have to be tough when the federal government invests, and you have to be accountable.

I remember having this discussion with Mauril Bélanger at the time. He said the same thing, that it was important to keep your eye on the money. Where does the money go once it's in the provincial coffers? We must be able to trace it.

So this remains important, and I invite you to make it a criterion of bilateral agreements. I don't want to sound overly optimistic, but I would say that the winds of change are blowing in British Columbia. I will let my colleagues answer, but I find everything is timely. How will the \$400 million announced in yesterday's budget be affected? It lacks concrete details. And how will we be able to ensure that the province will invest this money in the right programs once you have made your recommendations? I invite you to be rigorous about it.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I have another question, and it's for Mr. Witwicki this time.

I want to talk about your third recommendation, that is, the teaching of the second official language, French, and, where applicable, the indigenous language of the region, should become mandatory and be protected by a constitutional guarantee, with the goal of reconciliation.

Not being from here, but from Quebec, I would like to know how many aboriginal dialects there are in the regions of British Columbia. Is there one or several?

Mr. Patrick Witwicki: I can't answer for the entire province, but I know which languages are in our region. In Haida Gwaii, there is Haida. In Prince Rupert, there is Sm'algayax, the language of the Timshians, which is also spoken in Terrace. Do you say "dialect" in French?

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Yes, that's right. You are very good, by the way.

Mr. Patrick Witwicki: In Kitimat, it's Haisla. In Hazelton, they speak Gitanmaax, which I already mentioned, then Wet'suwet'en in Smithers. So there are six.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Yes, that is indeed six.

Mr. Patrick Witwicki: There are 36 languages in all.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Here's where I'm going. This all looks great on paper. I'm speaking to you now as a politician, since we are the legislators. To be able to offer education in the region's native language, how can this third official language be determined if there are several dialects? Do you understand what I mean?

Mr. Patrick Witwicki: Yes, I understand.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I am very sincere in asking you this question. The wording of your recommendation would force us to reopen the Constitution, and I'm not sure that the members of the committee are so keen on it.

That said, I fully understand you. However, I invite you to put yourself in the legislator's shoes and imagine just how complicated implementing your recommendation, which doesn't just target British Columbia, would be if it was to apply to the entire country, where there are many aboriginal dialects. I would like to know how many of these dialects there are.

• (1115)

The Chair: Mr. Lewis could help us with this.

[English]

Mr. Glyn Lewis: There's only one thing I would add. I think it's a really interesting question. Patrick has lived this, because he lives in the community. He's right there. He has worked with a lot of these chiefs of these first nations communities. I remember when they closed the French immersion program on Haida Gwaii, as Patrick mentioned in his speech. It was a successful program. They had a fantastic teacher. It was actually a trilingual program, as I think Patrick mentioned. Patrick and I went to that school together in Haida Gwaii. An elder came into the classroom and taught the kids Haida. This was a French immersion program, so in fact these students were learning three languages, including Haida.

I thought that was a beautiful model of reconciliation where languages could flourish side by side, but as Patrick mentioned, there was political push-back from some of the leaders in the first nations community in seeing French as this colonial language. There was a resentment against French as being this colonial language. It was some of that political push-back that led to the decision to close this very successful French immersion program.

I'm not speaking as a representative of CPF now. I'm speaking as a west coaster who believes in our two official languages. Personally, I think we could have shown more, in terms of reconciliation and support, that when it comes to what we do value and cherish, this isn't just about our language. We also value and cherish your language and your culture. I think it's those overtures that Patrick is talking about. I'm not trying to speak for him, but I think that's what he's trying to say. How can we show that we're not just advocating and representing ourselves but we're also recognizing and wanting to support your language and culture too?

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

We'll now go to Dan Vandal.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Please introduce yourself.

Mr. Dan Vandal: My name is Daniel Vandal, and I represent the riding of Saint-Boniface—Saint-Vidal in Winnipeg. This is my first term as a federal member of Parliament.

Mr. Witwicki, would you like two minutes to answer Mrs. Boucher's question?

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: It was a good question.

Mr. Patrick Witwicki: It was a very good question.

I used the example of Hazelton, where the three languages are used. It's important because in the three small communities of Hazelton, South Hazelton and New Hazelton, the people have the support of the Gitksan nation. The three languages are taught in school, as is the case in Haida Gwaii. Just before Christmas, there was a show where the children sang a Christmas song in English, French and Gitksanimaax. Since I wasn't there, I can't tell you what song it was.

In some communities, even in Prince Rupert where French immersion is supported by the school boards, students between grades five and eight who are not in French immersion must choose core French or Sm'algayax, but they can't learn both. We feel that if the school board, either in Prince Rupert or Haida Gwaii, decided to introduce a rule that the three languages—French, Haida and English—must be taught, even the people who wouldn't want that would be required to respect this rule. We have seen where it works and where it doesn't, as Mr. Lewis said. That's our reality in the northwest.

In the process of reconciliation, Indigenous peoples want to protect their language, and this is very important. At the same time, in Haida Gwaii, the Haida are placing their children in a French immersion program. Yes, we want to protect our languages, but we also want the students to have the opportunity to learn French, because they will have many more job opportunities once they graduate than if they spoke only one language.

•(1120)

Mr. Dan Vandal: Mr. Witwicki, I have another question for you, and I don't have much time.

First, I must say that I find this subject fascinating. You said that, if they had the choice, the school boards would prefer not to offer an immersion program, and that stood out for me.

Can you explain the role of the provinces, the school boards and the municipalities in the administration of education in British Columbia?

Mr. Patrick Witwicki: Do I have to answer in five minutes?

Mr. Dan Vandal: You can try.

Mr. Patrick Witwicki: There are four school boards in our region, and each one is different. The school board in Prince Rupert supports the French program. It works, and everyone is happy.

The Coast Mountains school board, which includes Terrace, Hazelton and Kitimat views this program negatively. I'll say it in English:

[English]

We have this program because we have to or some parents will be upset.

[Translation]

The people on the school boards of these places and the Smithers school board have the perception that they don't have the choice. As for the teachers—

Mr. Dan Vandal: I have a more specific question for you.

Can school boards determine the percentage of tax paid by the citizens for education? In Manitoba, citizens determine this percentage, and 50% goes to education. Is it the same thing here?

Mr. Patrick Witwicki: I think it's different here. I don't know if anyone else can answer this.

Mrs. Diane Tijman: I'll answer.

In our system, the money comes from the provincial government. Right now, the amount is about \$11,000 per student. What's more, each school board or community imposes a tax on homeowners. The money from this tax is only a supplement and does not constitute the basis for funding the school system.

Mr. Dan Vandal: I understand. The federal government remits funds to the province, which also gives money. The school boards or municipalities provide another third, another part of the money. Is that it?

Mrs. Diane Tijman: Yes.

I should say that, with respect to French, a small supplement is given to schools, to school boards, depending on the number of students in that program, depending on the percentage of French language instruction. For example, if a child is in kindergarten in a 100% French program, the school will receive the maximum. In the case of a Grade 12 student with only one course in French, the amount will be much less. It is up to the school board to manage the funds, distribute them to schools and keep a little for program management, teacher support and all the rest. Generally speaking,

the money that comes from community member taxes is separate, but I don't know what the school boards do with it.

The Chair: We have to move on to another speaker.

François Choquette, it's your turn.

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much for being here today.

My name is François Choquette. I am the MP for Drummond and NDP critic for official languages.

I have in front of me a table showing the evolution of enrolment in French as a second language and in French immersion. I see that there was a decrease in French-as-a-second-language enrolment from 2001 to 2015, while there was an increase in French immersion across Canada.

What explains a decrease in French-as-a-second-language learning and an increase in French immersion? Is it a failure when it comes to teaching French as a second language and good news for French immersion? How can you explain this to me? Would someone like to answer my question?

•(1125)

Mrs. Diane Tijman: Okay.

I just want to say that the action plan was announced in 2003. I remember that Stéphane Dion came to our community to make this announcement. The general idea was to double the number of bilingual children upon leaving school. People really took this plan to heart and, in some communities, the objective was achieved.

Mr. Lewis, would you like to add a few words?

[English]

Mr. Glyn Lewis: Just really quickly, François, this is also something that I mentioned in my presentation. The number you're looking at, with the lines going down, that's the core French number. It's the core French, as I mentioned in my presentation, that we recognize is a struggling program. It's not as strong as it should be, which is unfortunate because of how many students are participating in that program. As I mentioned in my remarks, about 180,000 students in B.C. are in core French. That number is consistently dropping.

I think you raise an interesting question. Is part of that drop because they're going into French immersion? That could be part of the reason, but it's not a big part of it, because of just how big the difference is between those two numbers. The bigger problems, in terms of the drop that you see in that line, have to do with the quality of instruction, the teachers feeling confident to teach the language, the teachers feeling confident to help inspire those kids to stay in the classroom, and then all of the extracurricular things that might complement that.

I would also add that there is more and more competition from other second language programs, so they have more and more choices in terms of core Punjabi, or core Mandarin, or core whatever else.

Ms. Danielle Dalton: I already speak French, so I'll do this in English.

I know for a fact what some of the situation we have is, and it's very simple. My husband has been a schoolteacher all his life, so I have been able to be fully immersed. Also in my past life, I was a teacher, a facilitator, or whatever it is you want to call me, and I've had opportunities to work at that level. It goes like this: when BCTF gives you a certificate to teach, you're supposed to know and be able to teach everything, including chemistry, math, biology, and language.

Imagine my surprise when, while teaching French, I have Nancy Griffith-Zahner in my class, the woman who is going to be spearheading core French. I wasn't surprised really because that happens all the time. We don't get support from BCTF, and another reason that schools really do not like to go outside is that we don't want to disturb BCTF. This is not a slight on BCTF. I'm just saying that the expectation at that level is that you teach everything.

We have lost specialization in our classrooms, many years ago, and this is one of the reasons students are having problems in math and in languages. There is no secret.

That is my answer.

Mr. Gino LeBlanc: That is the answer.

[Translation]

It's a quality problem, a problem of confidence in their language skills, as Mr. Lewis was saying. It's a problem related to the level of French proficiency these teachers have. In Canada, 75% of core French teachers say they are confident in their language ability. In British Columbia, a study that was done at Simon Fraser University, at OFFA, reveals that only 22% of teachers are confident in their language skills.

This is exactly what Mrs. Dalton is saying. We have people in front of students who are not at the level they should have reached. So we have a problem with the quality of the program, even if the desire to learn French is real.

• (1130)

Mr. François Choquette: Demand for French immersion is really strong. So I guess the program is good, and the teachers are competent. The problem is the number of spaces. There aren't enough. Have you roughly assessed how many spaces are missing compared to demand? How many spaces are lacking? Would it require a big investment? I believe the federal government has invested nearly \$115 million in OLSPs, the official languages support programs.

What more is needed? Have you evaluated the number of people who would like to participate in the program and who, unfortunately, have to rely on a lottery to do so?

[English]

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Dalton.

[Translation]

Mrs. Danielle Dalton: May I respond?

I will be brief. I'm someone who is interested in the facts. Here's how it works: there are 500 students who want to enrol in French immersion, and there is room for 30. That's my answer.

Mr. Gino LeBlanc: Mr. Choquette, I spoke about the quality of teachers, but there is also a problem in terms of the program. British Columbia doesn't have a standardized program for core French instruction. There are huge variations from one school to the next and from one school board to the next. We recently did a study on the core French program in British Columbia. Unfortunately, since the ministry so ordered, I cannot share the findings with you. However, I can say that there is no established program. In other words, we rely on the good will of the teacher.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. LeBlanc.

René Arseneault has the floor.

Mr. René Arseneault: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank everyone for being here.

This is very interesting. I am the MP for Madawaska—Restigouche. We are talking about aboriginal languages. Madawaska is a Malecite name, and Restigouche is a Mi'kmaq name.

I am a Liberal MP, since all Atlantic ridings are Liberal. I like to say that the sun always rises in the Atlantic and then enlightens the Centre and the Pacific.

That was said as a joke.

This morning, we talked to people from the education sector. I am really surprised that there is no firm program in British Columbia. You mentioned the core French program. I may be naive, but I find it inconceivable that school boards may choose different curricula within the same province. That's not happening in my province, and I thought it was the same everywhere.

Earlier, Mr. LeBlanc, a fellow Acadian from New Brunswick, spoke about needs. All this is a synergy, a spinning wheel. It takes a community for people to thrive in French. Education is essential for this to be possible. We also need people to maintain it and promote it. In short, we are talking about a community symbiosis in the case of education.

We have with us Mr. Hubert from the Alliance Française de Vancouver. We also have representatives from the Association des francophones et francophiles du Nord-Ouest.

You saw the budget and heard about the \$400 million. What do you think are the main areas to feed?

Mr. Hubert, let's hear it.

Mr. Damien Hubert: We have already said; it is teacher training. We need to train a lot more teachers. As we have already made these very good arguments, I will not repeat them. We are talking here about the quality of teachers, which will increase students' confidence in learning; there are also more opportunities to teach, and therefore an increased number of classes. That's one of the priorities, in my opinion.

• (1135)

The Chair: Mr. Hubert, I would like to know if the Alliance Française is funded by the French government.

Mr. Damien Hubert: No, not at all. As I said, the cultural programs are financed by our affordable French classes. We work with other francophone community associations. We are entirely self-funded.

Mr. René Arseneault: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Those were good comments.

On a community level, what could be done to promote the importance and the vitality of the French language? Are there tools other than education that could be used in conjunction?

Mr. Damien Hubert: I mentioned the immersion programs in my presentation and Mr. Lewis did so too. Those programs bring the language to life. When children learn a language, they can see that it is possible to use it in other situations, at the movies, for example. There are lots of opportunities and cultural events that allow them to immerse themselves, and they are important.

When you learn a language in isolation, by yourself, and, when you get home, you speak English—or another language—learning becomes a long road. Conversely, you will be more motivated and your learning will be better if, as well as being taught, you can practice the language and can see that French is used in professional situations in British Columbia and elsewhere.

Mr. René Arseneault: I was talking about tools used in conjunction with education; extracurricular activities are a good example. The vitality can continue after the classes. For francophone minorities, including the one in British Columbia, we might think about sports, for example, or any activity held outside of, but associated with, the schools. My question can go to either Mrs. Dalton or to Mr. Hubert.

In your regions, is it always the same people, the same volunteers and the same physical education teachers who look after the activities in French, like weekend sports, or theatre or cinema?

Mrs. Danielle Dalton: Yes, Mr. Arseneault, they are always the same three volunteers.

Voices: Ha, ha!

Mr. René Arseneault: It's the same in other places.

Mr. LeBlanc, would you care to comment?

Mr. Gino LeBlanc: The post-secondary situation is the same. Tomorrow, we are having French Fête at Simon Fraser University, as part of the Printemps de la francophonie program. As you know, the Rendez-vous de la francophonie is held in March.

Even though I am in a post-secondary educational institution, I need those activities to motivate our young people. That is why I invest at least a third of my budget in order to create life in French on campus.

Mr. René Arseneault: Do I have any time left, Mr. Chair?

Okay.

Mr. Lewis, Mr. Witwicki, if I understand correctly, you are not francophone. Could you tell me where the French language has taken you?

Did you naturally hang out in certain places, such as community centres?

How have you experienced your personal francophonie, your “francofolie” outside school?

Do you want to answer that, Mrs. Tijman?

[English]

Ms. Diane Tijman: I'm from Vancouver. My parents didn't speak French, but my mother loved French, and I learned French.

I'm a member of a choir in Maillardville. Our choir is directed in French. We sing in French and other languages. They're absolutely crucial—activities beyond three o'clock—for teachers or for young people, to maintain your language. I also travel. I make a point of going places where they speak French.

I have children who've graduated from the program. How can they maintain their language beyond age 18? They have to have some experiences. The Explore and Odyssey programs are examples. The immersion weekends offered through the universities are wonderful opportunities, as well as Alliance Française. I went to the *galette des rois*, a little party at the Centre francophone in Vancouver. There are activities.

I guess what's missing is that some people don't know where to go. We are lucky in the Lower Mainland that we live close enough, but for people in the north, it's harder to find the activities.

The Chair: You have to know that René is a French singer, also.

● (1140)

[Translation]

Now we move to the next speaker. Mr. Samson, the floor is yours.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Good morning, everyone. Thank you for being here today.

My name is Darrell Samson. I am the only elected Acadian in Nova Scotia—a title of which I am proud—though I have a colleague from New Brunswick.

Before I was elected, I was the executive director of the French-language school board in Nova Scotia for 11 years. Before the French-language school board was established, I worked for the English-language school board, where I was responsible for immersion and core French. At the time, there were still no French schools. We managed to establish a strategy that worked very well. However, it may not correspond to your situation; it may not be how things work for you. You said that 80% of the teachers are not comfortable with the French language. That was not the problem for us. Our problem was that those teaching core French felt that they had less support and greater teaching challenges to deal with than immersion teachers.

The union didn't like me because, to solve the problem, I gently forced teachers who could teach both languages. Immersion teachers were required to teach two core French courses and core French teachers were required to teach two immersion courses. This completely changed the teaching, because for the first time it wasn't just the students who were seen as the elite, but the teachers, too. Core French teachers quickly learned how to teach, because it's easier to teach in immersion. That was just an aside.

Mr. Lewis, I have very good news to announce. I haven't checked with my colleagues, but I'll still share the good news. In fact, you have the right to enrol your future children in French school. You won't have to put their names on the waiting list for immersion. You are from a French-speaking family; your mother was francophone, if I'm not mistaken. However, that doesn't change anything because your sister or brother attended French school. If a child is a rights-holder, the whole family becomes rights-holders too. For the next 100 years, all children will be included in the definition of rights-holder.

Mr. LeBlanc...

Mr. Glyn Lewis: I would like to respond to Mr. Samson.

[English]

I'm lucky

[Translation]

My mother was a French teacher, and my sister took a French-language program. However, I have friends whose mothers didn't speak French, but they still went through a French immersion program. In British Columbia, there is another category made up of kids who went through the French immersion program, even though no one in their families was francophone.

Mr. Darrell Samson: My solution was good only for you, for the moment. We could talk about it later.

Mr. LeBlanc, I appreciated your intervention. Last year, I visited the Simon Fraser University campus. I even gave a ten-minute presentation to students of a program offered to young people in the community and related to learning French. I was very impressed by the Office of Francophone and Francophile Affairs. I am thinking mainly of the university senate, where the problem is often to create new programs.

Tell us about that. Earlier, you mentioned that there was funding in that regard.

Mr. Gino LeBlanc: We become masters in curriculum development to avoid university senates. Your remark is relevant.

I'll take a concrete example: criminology courses in French. Simon Fraser University has a criminology program in English. We add the letters "fr" to existing courses, but we still need to find teachers who can give these courses in French. I have to recruit professors in Acadia, Laval or Saint-Boniface. In short, to facilitate the development of new programs, we are Frenchifying existing English programs. This way, we don't have to go back to the senate. Otherwise, it would take years.

•(1145)

Mr. Darrell Samson: That's a very good strategy. I know that several other places do this, because I know a little bit about post-secondary education.

David Brennick, who has already been the national president of Canadian Parents for French, is extremely effective. I don't know if you know him. He's from Nova Scotia.

You gave some explanations about core French. In Nova Scotia, there is an integrated program, that is, a second subject course is offered, for example mathematics or social studies. Is there something similar here to promote learning French through a core French program?

[English]

Ms. Diane Tijman: I was a core French teacher for 20 years.

Core French is one course. We call it the drip-feed method; it's a little bit and that's why it's so slow and eventually so unsuccessful. I'm a product of that system. I came through core French, though Vancouver, but it was through many years of studying, cultural experiences, and living elsewhere.... As far as core French and your question go, no, it's one course within the program.

Mr. Darrell Samson: That could be one strategy that you could try to integrate to convince government...they're sitting around us all the time....

You spoke about a continuum.

[Translation]

I'm really interested in the continuum. You raised a very important point by saying that section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms is silent with respect to the teaching or learning of French for children under the age of 5 and for people 18 years and older. This has always been a big problem. Even we couldn't teach French to preschoolers or post-secondary students.

Now, the Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones and several other national organizations are highlighting the importance of this issue. Even our committee made recommendations to that effect.

I see that my time is up. Thank you very much for your presentation.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Samson.

Mr. Généreux, it's your turn.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Good morning, everyone. I want to thank you very much for being here.

Mrs. Dalton, I like you very much.

The Chair: Do you want to start by introducing yourself?

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Excuse me.

My name is Bernard Généreux, and I am the member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, a riding in Quebec along the St. Lawrence River.

Mrs. Dalton, I like you very much. You get straight to the point. In fact, all francophone associations in British Columbia should send you to see the Minister of La Francophonie or the Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs to explain to her how British Columbia should act on francophone affairs.

Mrs. Danielle Dalton: Any time.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Mr. LeBlanc, I don't want to get into politics, but you said that the delay had accumulated over 10 years because of the lack of investment or the reorganization of the investment. I know that the government of the day, of which I was a part, made difficult decisions to return to balanced budgets, which it believed to be justified and justifiable. Francophone communities across Canada and many scientific organizations and others have suffered the consequences for it.

All morning, I have been hearing that, despite everything, the francophone network is developing in British Columbia and Canada, and that there is an absolutely spectacular desire on the part of the entire francophone community outside Quebec to take its true place and put everything in order to ensure its development.

You said from the outset that money didn't solve everything and that a real will was needed. Earlier, Mrs. Boucher said that the federal government was giving money to the provinces and that, despite all the agreements, the provinces are not always doing what they should or what is planned that they do. We must absolutely mention it in our findings. The federal government must ensure that there is accountability and that the money is spent for the purpose intended. Despite all the goodwill of the federal government, there are always two parties to an agreement and two sides to every coin. Unfortunately, I'm noticing today that the other party isn't doing its job. This is unfortunate, but that's the way it is.

I want to give all the witnesses the opportunity to speak to this, but before that I want to congratulate you, Mr. Hubert. Your organization doesn't receive any subsidies, but still offers French classes to hundreds of individuals. Again, it's not a question of money, but of will. Money helps a lot, but there has to be a will. I congratulate you, and I'm really amazed to see all you do and all the energy you put into it, as do the other groups that were here this morning. All of this is of great interest to me.

• (1150)

[English]

Mr. Glyn Lewis: I'll just speak really quickly.

Thank you for mentioning that. This question of accountability is really interesting.

In B.C. there is about \$10 million that comes from the federal government every year for French second language education. That is \$10 million, roughly, off the top of my head.

Roughly, about \$8 million of that goes to school districts that provide French immersion and core French, as Diane mentioned earlier, based on how many students they have in each. So 80% of the federal French funding that comes to our province for French second language education goes to school districts. That's where the level of accountability really needs to be with respect to how these monies are being used.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Yes, but it's the provincial level that should take care of that, not the federal level. Well, it should be both, actually.

Mr. Glyn Lewis: Well, here is the thing. We meet with the provincial government often and we say, "Here are the things we're looking for", and some things require funding and some things don't require funding. This does not require funding. Accountability and transparency in the reporting does not require additional funding. It just means that they have to do a little bit more work to show us how they're spending the money. They'll push back. The school districts don't want to do that extra reporting, and we continually ask them to do it, and all those kinds of things.

Where I think there is more of a role for the federal government is to require more transparency and accountability right down to the school district level, because it's the money of the federal government; so that's where I think the lever of power is to ask for that information.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I want to take this opportunity to say that Ms. Major is here; she is representing the Department of Canadian Heritage. I hope that these messages will be heard.

Go ahead, Mr. Witwicki.

Mr. Patrick Witwicki: I would like to add something. It's the same thing about school boards. A few years ago in Smithers, the principal of the immersion school had to decide how to use the money that he had received for education in French. Yet when we asked the school board what he had done with the money, no one had an answer.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Finally, if I may, I would like to ask you if there is a grouping of all the francophone associations in British Columbia, who represents you when it comes to going directly to the government?

Mr. LeBlanc, perhaps you would like to answer.

Mr. Gino LeBlanc: There is the Fédération des francophones de la Colombie-Britannique, whose representatives may have been here this morning.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Does it speak for all the francophone organizations?

Mr. Gino LeBlanc: It mobilizes many organizations, including ours, around certain issues. So there are meetings of presidents, and observers can attend. We have a summit twice a year. Yes, it's structured.

You talked about provincial issues, and British Columbia is the only province in Canada that does not have a French-language service policy. I don't know if you want to include that in your report. Alberta has just adopted a policy on this, so there is an exception, and it is our province. Certainly it would help us if the province had... As I said, for the first time ever, we have a Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs, Mr. Dix.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Yes, Mrs. Dalton.

Mrs. Danielle Dalton: I just wanted to say a little something about the federation, where I worked for 13 or 14 years. I think there is only one answer. I repeat it every year when I attend meetings: as long as the federation does not require our exchanges within it to be done in both languages, we will always seem worthless.

Thank you.

• (1155)

The Chair: That has the merit of being clear.

In closing, I would like to thank you all for your participation. I think it was very rewarding for the committee to hear from you and to have an opportunity to speak with you this morning. I am sure that at some point we will produce a report that should help you keep the French language shining in British Columbia.

So, again, thank you.

Just before adjourning, I would like to remind committee members that we are meeting on the second floor in the Pacific Room. Please bring your belongings, because we will leave immediately after dinner to visit a site.

Mr. Arseneault, do you have something to add?

Mr. René Arseneault: I just want to remind the witnesses that we are part of a committee that hears evidence, which can be verbal or written. These testimonials will be included in our report. If there are any important elements that you think you haven't mentioned to the committee, please send them in writing to our clerk because, without this information, we can't demonstrate arguments and proposals when we draft the report.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

The meeting is adjourned.

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