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## **Standing Committee on Official Languages**

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**EVIDENCE**

**Thursday, March 1, 2018**

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**Chair**

**The Honourable Denis Paradis**



## Standing Committee on Official Languages

Thursday, March 1, 2018

• (0905)

[*Translation*]

**The Chair (Hon. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.)):** Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3), we are conducting a study on access to early childhood services in the minority language.

Before we move to the study, I would like to take a few moments to pay our sincere respects to Senator Claudette Tardif. We are in Edmonton, her home city. Ms. Tardif is a trailblazer for the francophonie across the country, but particularly in the west. She was a senator in the Senate of Canada for about 13 years. The goal of this meeting is to pay tribute to her.

For approximately 10 years, Ms. Tardif was the president of the Canada-France Interparliamentary Association. Ms. Tardif and the French language are inextricably linked. I absolutely wanted our record to show the esteem in which we hold this great Canadian, through whom the French language shines forth from coast to coast.

Ms. Tardif, may we invite you to say a few words?

**Hon. Claudette Tardif (As an Individual):** Mr. Chair, and all members of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages who are here in my province, first let me thank you for your kind words. I am very proud to welcome you to Edmonton; I am also very pleased that you are here to listen to people from the Franco-Albertan community who put so much energy and determination into furthering the progress of the French fact in Alberta.

As you rightly said, the Standing Committee on Official Languages is close to my heart. I was a member of the committee since I was appointed to the Senate in 2005 and I have worked in the area for many years. Our Canadian identity and the value that we attach to bilingualism and our country's linguistic duality are very dear to me. Let me wish you a very successful meeting.

Thank you very much for the appreciation you are showing me.

**The Chair:** Ms. Tardif, thank you very much for everything you have done and for all that you will continue to do.

**Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.):** Ms. Tardif, where are you with the consultations? You are still very involved with this matter.

**The Chair:** This morning, we are pleased to welcome the following witnesses: as an individual, we have Dolorèse Nolette, Assistant Dean and Director of the Centre collégial de l'Alberta, Campus Saint-Jean; Albert Nolette, from the Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta; Nathalie Lachance, from the Conseil scolaire

Centre-Nord; Marie Commanche-Shulko, from Edmonton Public Schools; Cynthia Huard, president of the Institut Guy-Lacombe de la famille; Gillian Anderson, president of the Fédération des parents francophones de l'Alberta; and finally, Sarah Lessard, from the Société de la petite enfance et de la famille du Sud de l'Alberta.

Good morning, and welcome to you all.

We want to hear all your presentations, but we have to keep a little time for the questions that members may ask or the comments they may make. So you each have five minutes for your remarks, and I will be quite strict about it.

Ms. Nolette, the floor is yours.

**Ms. Dolorèse Nolette (Assistant Dean and Director, Centre collégial de l'Alberta, Campus Saint-Jean, As an Individual):** Good morning, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for having us and for your concern for not only the francophonie in Alberta, but also for the specific issue of early childhood.

My name is Dolorèse Nolette, and I am one of the assistant deans of the Campus Saint-Jean. I hold the position of Director of the Centre collégial de l'Alberta, which provides technical training in parallel to the academic education at the Campus Saint-Jean. The centre is in its first years of development.

The centre has been offering courses since September 2015. We currently offer two programs: business administration and tourism management, both two years in duration.

We have planned courses that are almost ready, including two levels of early childhood training required by the Alberta government for anyone wishing to work in various early childhood services. These courses, Early Learning and Child Care, Level 2, and Early Learning and Child Care, Supervisor Level, are about to be approved by the Alberta government's Ministry of Advanced Education. We hope to be launching Level 2, a certificate program, in September 2018.

Because of the needs of the francophone community and the urgency in providing qualified staff ready to work in all early childhood services, we are working with the Fédération des parents francophones de l'Alberta to offer these courses on an extracurricular basis in order to meet the immediate needs. We also want to help organizations or institutions to obtain the accreditation and recognition they need.

Are you going to tell me how much time I have left?

● (0910)

**The Chair:** You are halfway through.

**Ms. Dolorèse Nolette:** Great. I want to rise to your challenge!

We are in the process of developing an educational assistant program, with a specialization in phonological development and articulation—speech therapy assistant, that is. This kind of employee can help in early childhood. With the way in which systems are evolving in Alberta, we need employees of this kind. You can ask me about it, if it is an area that interests you.

I am now going to talk about the specific challenges we face.

You have to understand that our centre is a college-level institution, the Campus Saint-Jean, established inside the University of Alberta, a research university. We are always trying to open doors and to evolve the systems and the ways of thinking of the people from the larger institution. This is in order to provide college-level education in French and meet the needs of Alberta francophones.

As for the early childhood education program and its development, we are in the process of establishing a program for which the Alberta government tells us it has no new funds at the moment. Consequently, we are going to use the funds we will be given under the Roadmap for Canada's Official Languages to get the program up and running as we wait for better economic times in Alberta. We will then be able to apply for provincial government funding.

I believe that the Government of Alberta has a role to play. It must not simply rely on the official language communities establishing early childhood services.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much for your presentation, Ms. Nolette.

The floor now goes to Albert Nolette.

First, Mr. Nolette, the committee members and I would like to thank you sincerely for your active participation in organizing the day.

Please go ahead.

● (0915)

**Mr. Albert Nolette (Vice-President, Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I must thank you for your visit to the west, and particularly to Alberta, so that you can meet with our communities. I also must thank you for inviting us to testify as part of your study on access to early childhood services in the minority language.

My name is Albert Nolette. I am Xavier's dad. He is 22 months old, and he will shortly be joined by another child. So I have very personal reasons for becoming involved with the area of early childhood. I am the vice-president of the Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta, the ACFA.

Let me give you an overview of the ACFA. Our mission is to defend the interests of the francophone community in Alberta, to further their rights and to enhance their vitality. We represent the 268,640 Albertans who speak French, and we are their voice on issues that have an impact on the francophonie in Alberta.

In our initiatives and our actions, we are supported by several dozen institutions and organizations that work in close cooperation with us to ensure the vitality of the French language in Edmonton, Calgary, Fort McMurray, Lethbridge, Red Deer, Jasper, Canmore, St-Isidore, Bonnyville, Camrose, Grande Prairie, as well as other communities. In Alberta, we are privileged to watch a francophonie that is dynamic, diverse, flourishing, and rooted in a rich history.

According to Statistics Canada, the population of those with French as their mother tongue has grown by 28.9% in the last 10 years and by 55.5% in the last 25 years. Today, the number of those with French as their mother tongue stands at 88,220. Many francophones from all around the country, and from all around the world, come to settle here.

However, the rapid growth of our community, the fact that 26% of them are immigrants, and the increase in the number of interlinguistic families, bring with them major demographic changes, which give rise to a significant need to adapt services.

More than ever, early childhood is considered a priority for our community; we have actually made it a strategic objective in our community development framework for 2015-2020.

In a minority setting, you will agree that official language communities cannot rely only on the government to develop programs and services tailored to the linguistic and cultural realities in its area. Mostly, they have to create them themselves. However, many services provided directly to the public, early childhood services being a good example, are provided at provincial level by governments that do not always have any obligations to the minority, as is the case in Alberta. Our communities, therefore, are not always consulted or considered when programs are being developed. So the programs designed to meet the needs of the population in general are not always the most appropriate, the most effective, or the most efficient for our communities.

When we talk about early childhood services in minority communities, the objective is to complement interlinguistic francophone homes in order to make sure that the French language and the identity-building of our youngest are transferred. This additional, absolutely necessary mandate is often overlooked by our government. So it requires an additional, essential effort on the part of our community leaders working in the sector.

In that sense, it is imperative for the federal government to play a key role in funding and for it to finally define a mechanism that allows the language clauses to be reflected in federal-provincial transfers. It must make sure that funding allocated to minority language communities is invested in services that our communities design specifically for themselves. Those services have to adequately meet our needs, to follow a logical path that increases the capacity of the community and to actually be accessible to those who speak French.

Another option would be to interact directly with our communities on these issues, as is done in other areas of development, such as health, for example.

• (0920)

It is with great respect that we deliver these findings to you, and we hope that they will lead to important and beneficial changes that could preserve the vitality of Alberta's French-language community.

Thank you for your attention, and I am available to answer your questions.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Nolette.

We will now continue with Ms. Lachance.

Ms. Lachance, we're listening.

**Ms. Nathalie Lachance (President, Conseil Scolaire Centre-Nord):** Good morning.

I would like to thank the Committee for meeting with us today to take stock of one of the most important issues in the development of Alberta's French-language communities: early childhood. My name is Nathalie Lachance, and I am president of the Conseil scolaire Centre-Nord.

I would also like to recognize that we are in Treaty No. 6 territory, as well in Métis Nation of Alberta territory.

We are one of the province's four French-language school boards; close to 3,400 students attend our 19 schools. The development of French-language schools is the logical result of the development of structures and programs for early childhood. This period in a child's life is not only critical to their development, it also represents a key interval for them to learn and retain the French language. Moreover, this period plays an essential role in building the child's identity and their sense of community belonging. This is why school boards have adopted policies that aim to support programs such as preschool education in their schools.

We want to inform you of three challenges which seem to be recurrent in the delivery of early childhood services to communities served by our school board.

First, there is no guaranteed funding to ensure the stability and the harmonization of service delivery models for early childhood. In our province, the existence of a lot of French-language early childhood services is a near miracle. These services are the result of the commitment and goodwill of volunteer parents, the sponsorship of projects by associations that often have insufficient resources, and support from schools.

French-language schools are often gathering places for francophone families. These centres relay both language and culture to our youth, and organize activities around building their identity. It then seems normal to expect these minority schools to be a lever for the delivery of early childhood services. In some of our communities, there is pressure to include preschool programs—the fate of which is often uncertain—in the French-language education systems. The end result is a fragmented service delivery model. For example, in some cases, committees made up of parents use our schools' classrooms to set up preschools, whereas, in other cases, it

is up to the school boards to manage the delivery of the preschool program. The fragility of the services is putting children at risk before they begin their schooling.

Second, we deplore the lack of appropriate spaces. We regularly meet with provincial government officials to bring attention to our enormous infrastructure deficit. You can imagine that adding preschools and daycares to our schools is challenging in terms of space. Unlike all the province's English-speaking families, French-speaking families only have access to a few services. Francophone parents work and their increasing needs for early childhood services—in French—represent a challenge with regard to accessibility and proximity. In some rural communities, spaces are available, but there is a lack of personnel, whereas, in urban communities, there are not enough spaces to meet the demand. Families frequently see their identity and culture fade away when they cannot easily access affordable—something of concern to young families—and quality services offered in French.

French-language schools often face demand for spaces. Since spaces reserved for early childhood education in schools are generally more affordable, it becomes pragmatic, from an organizational point of view, and beneficial to include early childhood spaces in French-language schools. The benefit for parents transcends the aspects of identity building and consolidating French-language services. However, this solution promises equally uncertain results, because the spaces dedicated to early childhood education programs are rare, and cannot be guaranteed long term.

The increase in enrolment in many of our schools adds a level of fragility to the use of spaces for early childhood education. We face challenges related to the spaces needed for our pupils' schooling, and this leads to the troubling solution of having to ask daycare services to leave our schools—and this breaks our hearts. You can understand what repercussions this will have later on.

We measure the scope of the challenge related to the spaces and access to early childhood services every year, and preschoolers are only a segment of the children who are signed up for kindergarten in our schools. If we had more spaces reserved for early childhood programs, we could prepare our French-language schools to welcome larger cohorts of children.

The third challenge is the shortage of qualified personnel to meet our needs. The school boards are able to partly support the programs thanks to funding allocated in two specific areas: francization and support for special needs. However, these support programs only affect a portion of preschoolers. Consequently, the money available to support the school boards' early childhood education programs does not necessarily provide complete funding for the programs.

Recruiting qualified teachers to deliver the programs is as much of a challenge as retaining them. Furthermore, we are also faced with a shortage of qualified personnel in fields such as speech therapy and occupational therapy.

Thank you.

● (0925)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Lachance.

We are going to continue with Ms. Commance-Shulko.

Ms. Commance-Shulko, please go ahead.

**Ms. Marie Commance-Shulko (French Immersion Consultant, Edmonton Public School Board):** Good morning.

My name is Marie Commance-Shulko and I will give my presentation in English. Is that all right with you?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** That's no problem.

**Ms. Marie Commance-Shulko:** It's an honour and a privilege to be here today. Edmonton Public Schools has a long history of supporting second language programs for our students, our parents, and our teachers.

With Edmonton Public Schools, I work at the Institute for Innovation in Second Language Education, more affectionately called IISLE. I left some brochures with Christine and she's going to let you know what can happen with them. The brochures tell you about the services we provide for all the students in Edmonton Public Schools who are in the French immersion program.

Our language education history of French immersion began in 1974. Just to give you a little context, we currently have 17 French immersion schools in Edmonton Public Schools, which go from kindergarten through to grade 12, and we have 4,027 students in our program. At the kindergarten level, we have 458 students enrolled this year; and in grade 1, we have 455 students. We have policies and regulations about teaching and learning French immersion in a French immersion program.

For kindergarten and grade 1, 100% of the program is in French, until January of grade 2, when English language arts are introduced. Other than that, all subjects are taught in French by our teachers. The students who come to Edmonton Public Schools in kindergarten and grade 1, because that's when they can start, have had virtually no previous experience with the language. They come from homes where just English is spoken; they come from homes where French may be spoken a bit of the time; and more and more, many of our students are coming from allophone homes where neither French nor English is spoken.

I've also shared with Christine a quality second language programming tool that we have created for our teachers and our schools. It was written for administrators, parents, and teachers, to be a reflective tool on how they can examine and discuss different aspects of French immersion programming.

Edmonton Public Schools is very committed to inclusion, and by "inclusion" I mean that, for those 458 students who are beginning in kindergarten this year, we want to see all the students there 13

years from now when they graduate from grade 12. There has been a history in the past, and it's not personally one of our Edmonton Public Schools, of counselling students out of the program when they encounter difficulty. All our students are diverse learners, and we need to find the best practices and resources to support them in their learning.

We are working very hard at providing effective educational practices for kindergarten and grade 1 students, and we are going about adapting a lot of the resources that we use to a French immersion context. Some of those include practices such as guided reading and guided math, offering that in French, and literacy and math interventions.

Among the challenge we face in early childhood is the persistent myth that French is only for certain students. We, too, lack a number of paraprofessionals who speak French and who can support students at the early age. There's also a lack of age- and language-appropriate resources. We also find that there's a high cost and long travel times for French immersion students on the school bus as they get to the different schools in our board. As well, there is a lack of preschool places in French. A lot of our schools would like to offer French preschool, but they can't.

In terms of access in early childhood, one of the things we would like to see is access to bilingual reading specialists, psychologists, occupational therapists, and speech therapists so that they may work in French with our young students. We would also like to have some access to educational assistants who speak French. It currently is rare to find an educational assistant in a school who can speak French. Librarians would be very important for us to see in French, and access to quality resources that are age-appropriate for French immersion students. By that I mean resources that are language-appropriate but also not considered too babyish for them.

● (0930)

We would like access to low-cost, timely, reliable transportation to our French immersion schools. As I said, it would be great to have more preschools where our students can begin to learn the language at an even younger age.

In support for us, we would like to see more research on best practices for teaching our early learners in French immersion; funding and opportunities for educators, in addition to teachers, and paraprofessionals to learn French; more advocating at the provincial level for adequate funding for French immersion programs, including transportation; and certainly the continuation of the official languages in education program.

[*Translation*]

Thank you for your time.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Marie.

[*Translation*]

We will continue with Ms. Huard.

Ms. Huard, the floor is yours.

**Ms. Cynthia Huard (President, Institut Guy-Lacombe de la famille):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My thanks to the members of the committee for being here today.

My name is Cynthia Huard and I am the president of the Institut Guy-Lacombe de la famille. I am also the mother of three girls, who are one, three and five years old.

To lighten my presentation, I will use the acronym IGLF to designate the Institute. That's what we use in the community. Our mission is to help families in Alberta make the most of their knowledge, skills and abilities in French in order to achieve wellness. On a daily basis, we are referred to as a parental support centre, and we work directly with children aged zero to five, as well as with their parents. We are also working with school-aged children, but for today, I will focus on the early childhood services we provide.

Our mandate is to provide families with support that targets their growth, be it personal, social, cultural, identity-related or linguistic. We also provide training in parenting skills. We have a resource centre and a wonderful francophone library. We are working to integrate and reintegrate French in the home in terms of identity and culture. We are also doing some significant work on developing the sense of belonging, and promoting mental and physical health. We work in all these areas on a daily basis.

Since we are now dealing with the mandate issue, let me take this opportunity to highlight some facts. Unlike our anglophone counterparts at the Parent Link Centres, which have more than 50 centres across the province, we only have two parent support centres to work with francophone families. Our organization has a dual mandate. Let me explain what I mean by that.

Like all the Parent Link Centres, we need to provide support and resources to families with children who are five and under. So we are talking about a wide range of programs, activities, parenting skills workshops, child development questionnaires, and so on. We work in many areas.

However, our linguistic situation as a minority group also makes us work hard to transmit the culture and language, and to develop a sense of belonging to the francophone culture. We therefore have a dual mandate. However, the second part of the mandate—the transmission of language and culture—is not officially recognized by the provincial government. We receive no additional funding for this second mandate. In addition, the grant we receive from the Ministry of Children's Services at the provincial level is pretty much the same as for all other English-language parent support centres.

Furthermore, since our organization was recognized as a parental support centre by the provincial government, the government has put in place a moratorium on the creation of such centres. For 10 years, the province has created no new parental support centres. It goes without saying that this moratorium hinders the expansion of our services. As you know—Mr. Nolette talked about it—the

francophone population is growing in Alberta. In 10 years, many things have changed and the needs are not what they used to be.

For your information, last year, the IGLF provided services to approximately 2,500 individual participants. This year, we hope to see this figure exceed the 3,000 mark. While we are very proud of those numbers, we know that, unfortunately, we are reaching only a minority of francophone children in Edmonton and the neighbouring communities. We do not want to leave out other families, but unfortunately, for lack of resources, both financial and human, we cannot provide them with the high-quality services they deserve.

Anglophone families all have a parental support centre nearby. There are in fact Parent Link Centres in almost every ward in Edmonton. In contrast, francophone families only have access to two centres in the entire province, one in Edmonton and the other in Calgary. The IGLF hopes to expand in the capital itself to reach out to those francophone families, across the city of Edmonton. Unfortunately, many of them are penalized because our services are centralized in one single centre.

● (0935)

I would also like to add that the IGLF is really at the heart of the community, as we work hand in hand with schools and daycares. We want to become the reference of choice for parents who do not know where to turn. Through our parenting workshops, parents feel supported and listened to, and we find that those workshops have a direct impact on children.

Do I still have time?

**The Chair:** Your time is up.

**Ms. Cynthia Huard:** I provided the committee with my brief. I had other points to make, but I imagine the message—

**The Chair:** You may be able to do that by answering questions from members of the committee.

**Ms. Cynthia Huard:** Yes, certainly. I am willing to answer any questions you may have.

**The Chair:** We'll continue with Ms. Anderson.

**Ms. Gillian Anderson (President, Fédération des parents francophones de l'Alberta):** I will try to proceed quickly because my speech is quite long.

Good morning, my name is Gillian Anderson, and I am the president of the Fédération des parents francophones de l'Alberta, FP-FA. I have been on the board of directors for seven years and was elected president last November.

On behalf of our federation, thank you for travelling to Alberta. This helps us present our reality and have an open dialogue with you. We are very grateful for the time you have given us to personally discuss this critical issue for the parents we represent.

My four-part presentation is meant to be simple and clear.

First, I will talk about the state of French-language transmission in Alberta. Second, I will describe the needs for child care services to counter linguistic assimilation. Third, I will talk about the federal government's role in early childhood and the province's approach to reducing child care costs for some families and targeted child care centres, but not all. Finally, I will explain why our federation does not believe that this Alberta model serves the francophone community well. Thanks to our motivation to develop an entrepreneurial model, we added 93 francophone daycare spaces in the last year.

So let's start with the acquisition and transmission of French. Many studies show that the critical age for language acquisition in children is between zero and four years old. In October 2016, the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages published a report entitled "Early Childhood: Fostering the Vitality of Francophone Minority Communities". This report concluded that the longer a child waits to learn a language, the less likely they are to master it. In order for French-speaking children to learn and master French, they must first have access to high-quality early childhood services, and the sooner the better.

Access to parental support centres—there are two in French in Alberta—French-language junior kindergarten programs and child care services can help counter the influence of a predominantly anglophone environment by providing a more balanced English-French environment.

In Alberta, the rate of transmission of the French language from parents to their children is a concern. In fact, the rate of the transmission of French language is lower here than the national average. More specifically, when the mother tongue of both parents is French, only 74% of their children will speak French, compared to the national average of 90%. When only the mother speaks French, the transmission rate is 28%, compared to 40% nationally. Finally, when only the father speaks French, the transmission rate of French drops to 13%, compared to 29% at the national level.

I will now talk about the need for French-language child care. The 2011 census indicates that in Alberta, 2,950 students aged zero to four had at least one francophone parent. A 2014 study by Statistics Canada found that in Alberta, 40% of parents wanted to enrol their child in child care. This means that the real need would be 1,180 spaces in francophone daycare in the province.

In 2016, we conducted our own study on child care services. The study estimated the number of francophone child care spaces at 513. There are therefore 660 places missing. In addition, we found that the lack of child care spaces was closely linked to the lack of expertise to encourage the opening of new daycare centres, as well as a lack of human resources to effectively manage existing services. For example, French-language daycare services are mostly run by parent volunteer organizations that do not always have the time, energy or expertise to properly operate those services and ensure their sustainability.

In addition, our study prompted us to develop a centralized support model, based on the following 10 essential services to facilitate the creation of child care spaces: registration management; human resources; proper accounting; regulations; accreditation; gover-

nance; programming; communications; subsidies; and development.

One of those 10 services, in particular, is very innovative. We have created a bank of replacements available to beneficiaries of FPFA services. In other words, daycares and parents' associations that pay the costs of those services have access to our bank of replacements. The child care workforce is problematic across the country and has a high turnover rate. Our bank of replacements ensures continuity in the provision of services, both on big sites and smaller ones. Now, when an employee is absent or sick or resigns, the federation has its bank of employees ready and able to work.

• (0940)

I will now move to the Alberta model of child care support. First, we are grateful for the federal government's commitment and for its significant financial contribution to the provinces in support of early childhood. We recognize that each province has a responsibility to adopt its own approach in this rapidly changing issue. Our provincial Ministry of Children's Services advocates a daycare model at \$25 a day, while the average is \$55 a day for child care.

When Alberta launched its model in early 2017, it received seven applications for French-language projects, but none were selected. In the second call for tenders, in January 2018—

**The Chair:** Your time is up, Ms. Anderson.

**Ms. Gillian Anderson:** That's it?

**The Chair:** Yes. You can continue later by answering questions and comments from members of the committee.

We'll move to Ms. Lessard.

**Ms. Sarah Lessard (Executive Director, Société de la petite enfance et de la famille du sud de l'Alberta):** Good morning.

My name is Sarah Lessard and I am the mother of three little girls who attend a Conseil scolaire FrancoSud francophone school in Calgary. They are in junior kindergarten, grade one and grade three.

This matter inspires me and touches me personally. I'm really pleased that you came here to listen to what our community has to say. I have participated in discussions and conferences, where we always see this shortcoming for early childhood; it is highlighted. I'm truly glad that you're here to listen to us and meet all the partners in the community.

I'm here today representing the Société de la petite enfance et de la famille du Sud de l'Alberta, SPEFSA. Ms. Huard has already talked about support centres for francophones in Alberta. She is our partner in Edmonton, and I am in Calgary.

Our association was founded in 2007 with funding from the Community Action Program for Children (CAPC). Those federal funds are used to support family centres.



Ms. Huard talked a little about support centres. On our side, we had to wait 10 years. In 2016, the Government of Alberta finally recognized that we did not have funding for a support centre. We received funding from the federal government, but none from the provincial government. We had to wait until 2016 to receive funding from the Government of Alberta for the Calgary support centre. SPEFSA truly insisted that we get those funds and the recognition of our support centre designation in Calgary.

Since 2016, we have also received funding to set up projects in the regions. We are in Calgary, but our support centre wants to create a network for the communities in the regions. We have received funding to enable us to provide services in a number of areas in southern Alberta, which is the boundary of the territory we serve. We try to serve families in various regions.

In 2016, when we received just CAPC funding, there were 1,400 participants. In the last two years, since we received more funding from the Government of Alberta for the designation of the support centre, we have doubled our numbers. In two years, I think we have made great strides in early childhood in southern Alberta.

I will explain the services we provide, because I think it's important. Calgary is often the gateway to the francophonie. Families arriving in Calgary do a Google search on "francophone families". This is often how they find our organization.

We provide the francophone community with child development services, story-reading sessions, family yoga, crafts and many activities to develop all the children's abilities before they start school.

We provide our community with parenting education, which is important for family balance, in the form of "positive parenting practices (PPP)" workshops. Those workshops show families how to set up positive practices. The services are available in most English-speaking communities, but we in Calgary have only two centres providing those services in French. We also provide family support that can take the form of community cooking or prenatal classes, for example.

The information and guidance we provide to families is another aspect of our mandate. They come to us because they do not know anyone and do not understand how the system works. Our role is to guide them in their Calgary and Alberta experiences.

We also have a questionnaire on developmental stages, which is a very important tool. We work with daycares and parents. This questionnaire helps parents know what stage their children are at before they start school.

• (0945)

For example, this may help us realize that a child needs to develop their fine motor skills. Before they start school, we can provide support to our students to guide them towards independence so that they are ready for school.

Furthermore, we provide the only francophone library service available to families in Calgary. This meets one of their great needs. When they come in, they are amazed and are delighted to have the service. Unfortunately, we do not have a lot of funding to operate this service.

Finally, another service focuses on the transmission of language and culture. We are here to support families. At the support centre, we often see families who have just arrived in Calgary and have not been able to get jobs because they do not speak English. They therefore enrol their children in anglophone schools and activities exclusively in English. So we have to tell them that, if they want to stay in Calgary, it is essential that they support the francophonie. It's good to have those activities in English, but we have to explain to parents who come to Alberta that they have to support the francophonie, otherwise it will get lost.

• (0950)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Lessard.

**Ms. Sarah Lessard:** Is the time up?

**The Chair:** Yes, your time has been up for a minute and a half. You will be able to continue during the questions and comments.

We will begin the questions with members of the committee.

Mr. Généreux, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC):** Good morning, everyone. Welcome and thank you for being here. My name is Bernard Généreux and I am the member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup. For those who are familiar with Quebec, I would add that this riding is located south of the St. Lawrence, a little east of Quebec, towards New Brunswick.

Ms. Nolette, do not be offended if I do not ask everyone questions. We only have six minutes each.

Ms. Nolette and I have something in common since the Campus de Saint-Jean has had an agreement with the Collège de Sainte-Anne-de-la-Pocatière for decades. Many francophile anglophones have been coming to study French in La Pocatière for a very long time. In fact, I know Mr. Fortin, who was one of the champions of this trend and who still lives in Rivière-Ouelle, my home town in a way.

Yesterday, we were in Vancouver. British Columbia does not have legislation implementing an agreement with francophones. The fact that they are not recognized is a major impediment to all services and to their relationship with the province. My understanding is that, here in Alberta, it appeared one year or two years ago—someone can tell me. So it's relatively new.

Are you already seeing a difference in the relationship between the province and all the groups you represent with respect to the legislation that was implemented here in Alberta? If so, what does it look like?

We know that the needs of the francophone community in Canada are significant. We have seen it elsewhere. In fact, the witnesses who came to Ottawa for some of our other studies, from various sectors, all told us that the needs were tremendous and that you did not have the means to address them.

Ms. Lessard, does the implementation of new legislation by the province make it easier for you?

**Ms. Sarah Lessard:** You talked about the fact that we received funding, but that was before the policy was put in place.

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** So it's not necessarily because of the policy.

**Ms. Sarah Lessard:** No.

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** How about you, Mr. Nolette?

**Mr. Albert Nolette:** In fact, we are already seeing that the policy is bearing fruit. Alberta's French Policy was adopted by the Alberta government in June 2017.

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** So it has not been a year yet.

**Mr. Albert Nolette:** It's completely new. However, in my opinion, its implementation depends on the Alberta government's good faith. It does not create an obligation as such. Instead, it is a policy that encourages all departments to develop French-language services that do not entail additional costs.

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** Is there an envelope earmarked by the government or is there no budget at all?

**Mr. Albert Nolette:** My understanding is that there is a federal envelope. However, it already exists.

In order for Alberta to obtain funding, we must essentially take money from other provinces.

So there is a need—

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** I'm sorry to interrupt you, but I want to be sure I fully understand.

What you are saying is that the province can draw on federal funds from a common pot for all the provinces. If some provinces dip into those funds, the other provinces will get less. Is that what you are saying?

**Mr. Albert Nolette:** My understanding is that there is a fixed budget envelope for provinces that provide services in French. Alberta has just adopted a francophonie policy, and the budget envelope has not increased. So if Alberta is going to get funding, it will do so to the detriment of the other provinces. In my opinion, the envelope needs to be increased to support provinces that want to provide more services to the official language minority population.

• (0955)

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** Okay, thank you.

In our opinion, another very important aspect is the “by” and “for”. We have talked at length about it. Francophone communities in Canada want access to funding. If they do not receive it directly, we should at least ensure that the federal and provincial governments have an obligation to be accountable. We must ensure that the money allocated to the provinces for this or that francophone activity will be really used for that purpose, particularly in education.

Our understanding is that, when funds are transferred to the provinces for the francophonie, they are not always used by the services that have requested them.

Ms. Nolette, perhaps you could comment on that.

**Ms. Dolorèse Nolette:** I cannot comment on school-related matters.

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** Okay.

**Ms. Dolorèse Nolette:** Personally, I am working at the post-secondary level and I would rather not—

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** That's fine.

Our meeting is public. What we say here does not stay here. It's not like hunting, where what we say stays at the cottage. Everyone will be able to read our remarks. I do not want my questions to put you on the spot.

The committee's concern is that the federal money being spent is well spent. We want to make sure the money is used for the reasons it was given to the provinces. It is not always easy, because the federal government does not always ask the provinces to be accountable. However, that would really allow us to see the impact of the money spent.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Généreux.

We'll now go to Mr. Arseneault.

**Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I may come back to Mr. Généreux's questions because I find them relevant. They are among the questions I would like to ask, but I have only five minutes.

My name is René Arseneault, a proud Acadian from New Brunswick. I am the member for Madawaska—Restigouche, which stretches from the north centre to the northwest, from Chaleur Bay to the Restigouche River and to the Upper Madawaska lakes.

Mr. Nolette, I want to make sure I understand the numbers you mentioned earlier. The number of francophones has increased by 28% in the last 10 years, is that right?

**Mr. Albert Nolette:** Yes.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** The number of francophones has increased by 55% over the past 25 years, correct?

**Mr. Albert Nolette:** I no longer have the figures in front of me.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** Okay. In any case, that figure was not what mattered to me.

I actually wanted to know whether 45% of those francophones were in fact immigrants.

**Mr. Albert Nolette:** A very large proportion of francophones are immigrants.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** I rounded up to 45%, to have a round number, but that's it more or less, correct?

**Mr. Albert Nolette:** Yes.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** Okay.

We have heard a lot of witnesses talk about areas other than early childhood. At one point, we talked about immigration. Immigration is important. We have learned that it is a challenge to bring francophone immigrants here, but the challenge of retaining them is even greater.

Ms. Lessard, earlier, you have summarized something that we are all very familiar with, but I want to hear you say it again. You said that your organizations have become the gateway for francophone newcomers.

What impact can knowing that children are able to receive an education in French from an early age have on francophone immigration? In your opinion, what is the relationship between the retention rate of those francophone immigrants and the active offer of educational services, specialized services and all that? Do you see a relationship?

Is my question clear?

**Ms. Sarah Lessard:** No.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** Are you seeing a direct relationship between those two factors? In other words, does an active offer of early childhood services lead to a higher retention rate for francophone immigrants?

**Ms. Sarah Lessard:** I'm not sure whether I am going to give you the correct answer.

[*English*]

**Mr. René Arseneault:** You can say it in English if you want to.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Sarah Lessard:** I think we really need our services to be accessible so that we have a high retention rate. This is true not only for early childhood services, but for all areas. You have to catch children at the early childhood stage, if I may put it that way. You really have to take charge of the children at that stage. If they enter a system where there is no French, it is too late. We need to welcome them from infancy to increase the retention.

I have no statistics to give you and I have not done any calculations, but in my experience, the younger the children are when we take them in, the likelier they are to remain in the francophonie.

• (1000)

**Mr. René Arseneault:** Also, parents will stay in the regions.

In your case, you represent the southern region of the province.

Ms. Huard, do you have anything to add?

**Ms. Cynthia Huard:** I would like to add to my colleague's comments. Ultimately, our organizations are very similar.

I really liked the expression she used when she said that we were the gateway. You can already imagine how difficult it is to arrive in a new country; it's all the more difficult when newcomers can't speak in their own language. Often, when people come to our centre, they breathe a sigh of relief. They feel at home, they feel understood and welcomed. We support them and answer their questions.

We offer workshops just to inform them how to dress in winter. Some people who come to Canada have never experienced snow. We welcome them accordingly.

We also provide daycare services to allow parents to learn English, for instance. Other organizations take care of welcoming newcomers, teaching them English and helping them find a job. We offer daycare so that the parents can take steps like these.

We don't have statistics either that would enable us to determine whether our services help to increase the retention rate of immigrants. I'm not 100% sure, but I believe that our organizations help French-speaking newcomers to integrate here, in Alberta.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** Here, you may feel like you are in court, but it's really more laid-back. Your comments and the documents you submit to us become evidence that enable us to write reports. If there are things you didn't have the opportunity to provide, you can send the information to our clerk. It will help us draft our reports.

Mr. Nolette, do you have any statistics that show that the retention of francophone immigrants is more successful in regions where there is an active offer of early childhood services?

**Mr. Albert Nolette:** I don't have those statistics.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** Do you think they exist?

**Mr. Albert Nolette:** I'm sorry; I don't know.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** Okay.

I would like to come back to Mr. Généreux's comments. It is true that it's difficult for the federal government to track the funds allocated to francophone organizations, one by one, because the francophonie is scattered across a huge country, outside Quebec.

Is there an Albertan organization that oversees all the francophone organizations? For example, are all the members of the Alberta francophonie members of the Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta?

**Mr. Albert Nolette:** Yes, Mr. Arseneault. The ACFA is the representative of Albertan francophones. The ACFA speaks on behalf of all French-speaking Albertans. It wants to advance matters that affect the francophonie, including early childhood services. We work with all the other organizations, including the ones here today.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** I have five seconds left.

**The Chair:** You don't have any time left, but take those few seconds anyway.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** Mr. Nolette, I invite you to share with us, on behalf of all francophone communities and organizations, potential solutions that would help us figure out where federal government funding for Alberta's francophonie is going. For example, we want to know what the repercussions of those funds are, as well their benefits, so as to ensure that they count and help make some improvements.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Arseneault.

We will continue with Mr. Choquette.

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

My name is François Choquette, and I am the member for Drummond. I am also the vice-chair of the committee.

Ms. Nolette, you talked about training for staff. You said that the roadmap would enable you to add new programs. Can you say a few words about that?

**Ms. Dolorèse Nolette:** For the time being, only the roadmap funding will enable us to set up new programs. Campus Saint-Jean receives part of the envelope set aside for post-secondary education. The Centre collégial will take money from that envelope for the early childhood education program.

**Mr. François Choquette:** Thank you very much.

Mr. Nolette, you talked about a problem you are experiencing—the fact that there is no language clause in a number of federal transfers. You talked about the health transfer. We learned yesterday that the federal government's health transfer would sustain cuts, and that is causing us great concern.

Are there any other areas where success would be possible?

As for early childhood, unless I am mistaken, the federal government is currently not providing money for it. That is a significant lack. You just said how important early childhood is to maintaining, even building, our francophone identity.

What do you think about this? Is this an area where the federal government could conclude an agreement directly with the communities?

• (1005)

**Mr. Albert Nolette:** I think so, and I will let my colleagues in attendance today express their point of view on the issue.

To come back to what Mr. Arseneault and Mr. Généreux raised earlier, I would say that direct funding for communities would ensure a more efficient use of funds. Right now, the funds ultimately intended for official language minority communities go through several layers of red tape. For example, the funding intended for post-secondary institutions goes from the Department of Canadian Heritage to Alberta's Department of Education, then to Alberta's Department of Higher Education, then to the University of Alberta and, finally, to Campus Saint-Jean. That's several layers of red tape.

That is just one example of many. This phenomenon has been heavily criticized. I think funding should be provided more directly to the communities in Alberta and elsewhere in Canada. When it comes to education from kindergarten to grade 12, for example,

francophone school boards from across the country, which were created through provincial legislation, could conclude agreements directly with Canadian Heritage. That way, the funding provided by that department will not have to go through provincial departments, and then through school boards, before finally getting to the students. School boards are well managed. I am sure that Ms. Lachance could talk to us about the possibility of concluding those types of agreements.

In short, I feel that direct funding would be a way to ensure accountability and to avoid the money getting lost in layers of bureaucracy.

**Mr. François Choquette:** Thank you very much.

I have very little time left. I wanted to ask everyone a question, but I will unfortunately not manage to do it.

Ms. Lachance, you said that you needed more spaces reserved for early childhood. Can you elaborate on that need? How could the federal government support you, especially in terms of infrastructure?

**Ms. Nathalie Lachance:** Our needs in infrastructure are pressing. To be able to justify what we need from a school, we use facilities that are far from being adequate. We are often talking about old schools or rather commercial buildings that were not schools to begin with. You can understand how much of a challenge it can be to create classrooms, let alone spaces for early childhood. In some of our schools, we are managing to create pre-kindergarten classes, but it is becoming increasingly complicated to obtain spaces for early childhood, since schools are already at 100% or at 120% of their capacity.

As far as potential federal support goes, we would need help establishing schools that accommodate children from early childhood to grade 12. An understanding of the importance of schools is necessary; they're at the heart of the francophone community.

**Mr. François Choquette:** Does the problem stem from the fact that Statistics Canada does not have accurate information on rights holders, and that prevents you from asking the department for more schools, or does it stem from the fact that you are still waiting for new schools you requested?

**Ms. Nathalie Lachance:** I would say that it stems from both of those issues.

**Mr. François Choquette:** Both situations are problematic.

**Ms. Nathalie Lachance:** There is also attrition stemming from the fact that a number of rights holders do not enrol their children in our schools. That is a problem across the board.

• (1010)

**Mr. François Choquette:** Those are challenges for you, of course.

Ms. Commanche-Shulko, there is a great deal of enthusiasm for French immersion programs in British Columbia.

[English]

Is it the same here in Alberta?

[*Translation*]

There is also a problem with the teaching of French as second language. The program is somewhat problematic in British Columbia. People enrol less in French as a second language courses; they choose other languages instead.

Here, in Alberta, what are you seeing when it comes to those two programs?

**Ms. Marie Commance-Shulko:** My colleague Tamie Beattie will be here this afternoon to talk about the teaching of French as a second language, so you could put that question to her.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We will now go to a proud Acadian, Darrell Samson.

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC):** How much time do we have?

**The Chair:** You have six minutes.

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher:** Is that for the second round?

**The Chair:** No, it's for the first round. We are still in the first round.

Mr. Samson, you may go ahead with your presentation.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Have I not lost any time? Do I still have six minutes? I have not begun my presentation.

**The Chair:** Fourteen seconds have already passed.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Hello, everyone, and thank you for being here.

I am the only Acadian from Nova Scotia elected to the House of Commons. I carry all that on my shoulders because it is important to me. I worked for school boards for 31 years. Before being elected, I was the director general of all French-language schools in Nova Scotia for 11 years. I also had the distinct pleasure of working with Ms. Dolorèse Nolette for a few years. I had a lot of dealings with associations and organizations such as yours, and I would say the most important issue is early childhood. There is no doubt that this issue helps every member of the community build their identity and pride and improves the quality of education. That is the most important thing.

In Nova Scotia, when I was the director general, our system created an early childhood program, and I am proud to say that it now accepts four-year-olds. That is a big step forward.

I know there are officials from Canadian Heritage here. Someone asked earlier whether the federal government provides funding for early childhood education. I think early childhood is now one of the most important areas for Canadian Heritage, so it is possible to carry out projects with the department. The lines of communication simply have to be opened.

I have a question for anyone who would like to answer. I know my preambles can be lengthy at times and that is dangerous, and my colleagues often remind me of that, but here is the issue. I believe Alberta has just signed or will soon sign a new agreement with the federal government pertaining to early childhood. For the first time in Canadian history, there will be a clause that clearly re-

quires funding to be allocated to the francophone community. Would someone like to speak to that?

If you were not aware, I am pleased to give you the news. I would certainly like you to make calls this afternoon and ask questions because it is extremely important to be informed. This is a first, and it will now give you an avenue to seek essential funding.

Ms. Nolette, very quickly, has the number of children in early childhood education programs increased? Moreover, are those programs offered online?

**Ms. Dolorèse Nolette:** The short answer is yes, our programs are offered both online and in a classroom setting, according to student preference. Since we are still awaiting approval from the Ministry of Advanced Education to implement our program, I cannot really comment on the real interest. We do have a very clear idea, however, of the perceived interest, so to speak.

For the past three years, we have had an agreement with Lakeland College, here in Alberta. This agreement expires on March 31. Under this agreement, the college translated its program, which was entirely online, so it could be offered in French. We think we can now offer something that is more relevant to the francophone minority community by training educators who are sensitive to inter-linguistic and intercultural issues and to the realities of language development in a minority setting.

• (1015)

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Thank you. We just have six minutes, it will be quick.

Of course, I would like to congratulate the school board officials for their work. It is extremely important. Schools are the gathering place for the whole community and I would like to thank all the organizations that make a contribution to that in one way or another.

There is something new: for the first time, infrastructure funding is available through Infrastructure Canada. In the past, organizations always applied to Canadian Heritage for infrastructure and program funding, but it was hard to get because all the minority language communities were clamouring for it. We have now created a funding envelope for this at Infrastructure Canada and you can apply for funding. The only problem is that provincial projects will be put on a priority list. In some provinces, you have to beg to get on the list. At least you know that it exists: that will open the door to discussions for you.

As Ms. Lachance noted, the availability of spaces is a big issue. Once again, this is much more difficult for minority communities. Daycare and early childhood services are crucial. The problem is that we do not have any schools nearby. If parents truly want to send their child to a French-language school, the parents must have access to daycare before and after school. This is an extremely important argument that must be repeated as often as possible.

I can tell you that, in Nova Scotia, it is 95% due to the early childhood program that we have increased our student population by 25% across the province in the space of ten years. The total number of anglophone students has dropped by 15%, which is a 40% difference. It is true that the school board had a very good director general and very good teachers, but ultimately this was achieved by the work done on the ground.

Similarly, each of you has an extremely important role to play. I commend you and thank you for your work. We truly have a range of representatives here today, which reflects that vitality.

In closing...

**The Chair:** It is my turn to thank you, Mr. Samson, because we have to move on right away to the next person, Mr. Vandal.

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

I am the MP for Saint-Boniface—Saint-Vital, in Winnipeg.

I would like to pick up on what Mr. Samson was talking about. I was pleased to announce last Friday, on behalf of Minister Jean-Yves Duclos, a bilateral agreement on early childhood, between Manitoba and Canada. That same day, I believe, British Columbia announced the signing of the same kind of agreement. So Alberta has already signed it. The agreement with Manitoba is worth \$47 million over three years and is intended to create 1,400 daycare spaces in the province. We are trying to determine how many of those spaces will be for francophones, but it is not easy. In any case, as Mr. Samson said, there is a clause that guarantees spaces for the francophone community. I encourage you to do your own research and to take steps to figure out what you are due.

Since no one was aware of this agreement between Alberta and Canada, I have a question about dealings in the province. Does the Alberta government have a strategic plan for early childhood? Further, what kind of relationship do your organizations have with the provincial government?

Mr. Nolette may answer first.

• (1020)

**Mr. Albert Nolette:** I'm sorry. The question was what kind of relationship our organizations have with the provincial government?

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** First, does the province have a strategic plan for early education in French? More broadly speaking, what kind of relationship do you have with the province as regards early childhood?

**Mr. Albert Nolette:** Overall, our relationship is good right now, as evidenced by the announcement last June of a policy on the francophonie.

As to early childhood in particular, I will let Ms. Anderson answer.

**Ms. Gillian Anderson:** We have requested a number of daycare spaces. The funding we receive is for \$25 daycare spaces, but we also need a daycare network that serves the whole of Alberta, and not just \$25 spaces.

I am not sure if that answers your question.

At the FPFA, we are planning to establish a network of daycare centres that will serve the whole province, but that is our initiative. We are awaiting government funding to move forward with this.

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** How long are the waiting lists for French-language daycare spaces?

**Ms. Gillian Anderson:** The waiting lists are very long. French-language daycare spaces are not available everywhere. There are spaces in Edmonton, but not necessarily outside Edmonton or Calgary. There are spaces in some smaller towns, but not everywhere. The needs are not well known in fact since some francophone parents do not know that French-language daycare spaces are available. If they are never offered that choice, their children will always attend English-language daycare centres. If spaces were available at French-language daycare centres, I'm sure they would be used, but there are none.

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** I have a more general question.

In Alberta, is the francophone population concentrated in Edmonton or Calgary? Where is the highest concentration of francophones in Alberta?

**Mr. Albert Nolette:** There are francophones throughout the province. Of course there are more in Calgary and Edmonton, but there are pockets of francophones in the northeast, in the south, and in the Rockies. The francophone population is very spread out, but we are still a significant presence.

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** That makes it more difficult to offer services. In Winnipeg, most of the francophones live in Saint-Boniface—Saint-Vital. That makes it easier for the French-language schools and daycare centres.

What is the average annual salary of an early childhood educator in your province?

Would you like to answer, Ms. Nolette?

**Ms. Dolorèse Nolette:** I was hoping that question was not for me.

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** Anyone who has that information can answer.

**Ms. Dolorèse Nolette:** Honestly, I don't know.

**Ms. Gillian Anderson:** According to the figures provided a week ago, I think the average hourly wage ranges from \$17 to \$22, depending on the educator's experience and education.

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** I have 30 seconds left for a general question.

What is the main priority for French-language early childhood services in Alberta? Anyone can answer.

**Ms. Nathalie Lachance:** I would say it is offering services and access.

**Ms. Sarah Lessard:** We really have to reach francophones where they are. If we do not offer them the services, they will turn to the English-language system. They will not use our services in French. First, we need service points throughout Edmonton and Calgary, but also in the regions.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Vandal.

Ms. Boucher, it is your turn. You may start by introducing yourself.

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher:** I will not take much time to introduce myself because I want to give you as much time as possible to answer.

My name is Sylvie Boucher and I am a Conservative MP from the greater Quebec City area, specifically Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix. I served as parliamentary secretary to the minister for the francophonie and official languages, and as parliamentary secretary for the status of women.

You said earlier that, in order for there to be accountability, the money must go directly to the organizations. That has been done in the past and it failed. I remember because the Conservatives were in power at the time.

Alberta has just signed an agreement, but the requests for French-language daycare spaces are lost in and among the requests for English-language daycare spaces. There is nothing structured for francophones here in Alberta. Is that correct?

• (1025)

**Ms. Gillian Anderson:** There is but we need more funding to offer services throughout the province. We have ideas but it is hard to put them into practice without money.

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher:** Is the province favourable to your cause right now? There are federal transfers to the provinces, but it is up to the provinces to decide where that funding goes. Are the francophones of Alberta being heard? We were in Vancouver yesterday and heard that it depends on how things work. The francophones there are not recognized. Are the francophones of Alberta recognized as a minority?

**Mr. Albert Nolette:** I would say it varies and it depends on the field. In some fields, the relationship with the provincial government is excellent, but it is more difficult in other areas.

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher:** In which areas is the relationship with the provincial government more difficult? We need to know in order to help you.

**Ms. Nathalie Lachance:** I would say they are favourable to the cause of education. Yet we are often told that the economy is tough and that it is not just the francophone community that has infrastructure needs to catch up on.

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher:** Okay, that is clear. Thank you.

I will give Mr. G n reux the rest of my time.

**Mr. Bernard G n reux:** Hello, Ms. Boucher.

I would like to pick up on your answer, without putting you on the spot.

We are talking about infrastructure for early childhood. As you know, there is a crisis in Vancouver owing to the cost of rent and infrastructure. Prices are so high that it is nearly impossible to get new spaces. Does the same apply in Alberta?

I imagine there is a difference between Calgary and Edmonton, in terms of access to public spaces in particular. Are costs an obstacle?

**Ms. Nathalie Lachance:** Costs are high in Alberta. Labour costs are very high because they are tied to the local economy, and salaries in the natural resources sector are very high.

As to the cost of rent, I don't think it is the same as in Vancouver. The situation in Vancouver is unique in Canada.

**Mr. Bernard G n reux:** In terms of infrastructure, what is the priority? The government has added \$400 million to its budget for francophones right across Canada. We will see how that plays out. The devil is often in the details. We will have to see how the money actually gets to you.

If funding were available tomorrow morning, what would the top priority be for early childhood? Would it be building new daycare centres? Would it be putting daycare centres in schools or building them near schools?

**Ms. Sarah Lessard:** I will change hats since I also chair the parents' committee.

That is a recurring issue for us. Daycare centres have to be in the schools. We have to find a way of putting these infrastructures in the schools. That is the key, in my opinion. I do not think that would be too expensive. As you said, in order to increase enrolment at our schools, daycare services really have to be in the schools.

**Mr. Bernard G n reux:** In Quebec, we call that...

**The Chair:** Unfortunately, we will have to leave it there, Mr. G n reux.

On behalf of all the members of the committee, I want to thank you for your excellent presentations and the excellent discussion we have had. Your contribution to the committee's work is absolutely essential. In short, I commend you on your work on the ground. Congratulations!

**Voices:** Hear, hear!

**The Chair:** We will suspend now until this afternoon. We will welcome more witnesses at 2:00 p.m.

Thank you very much.

• (1030)

(Pause)

• (1405)

**The Chair:** Welcome to the continuation of this meeting of the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

First, I want to say that we are very happy to be here with you today in Edmonton.

This is a very special day. Earlier, I was given the text of the proclamation of Alberta Francophonie Month. This is quite extraordinary. I would like to read the document, not in its entirety, but I will read the three last paragraphs:

WHEREAS in March of every year Les Rendez-vous de la Francophonie are celebrated across Canada by 10 million French-speaking Canadians, including more than 268,000 in Alberta; and

WHEREAS on March 20 of every year, International Francophonie Day is celebrated around the world by more than 270 million French-speakers;

THEREFORE the Lieutenant Governor in Council orders that a Proclamation issue proclaiming the month of March of each year as Alberta Francophonie Month.

It is signed by the Honourable Rachel Notley, Premier of Alberta.

I think this is a really important gesture for Alberta. I simply wanted to highlight it.

We just visited a day care. This morning we pointed out how important it is for youngsters to learn French early in life. It is in this quite extraordinary context that we meet with you here today, and we are very pleased about it.

I'd like to welcome the various stakeholders we are receiving today. First, we have, as an individual, Ms. Martine Cavanagh, who is a professor at the Campus Saint-Jean of the University of Alberta; Ms. Katherine Mueller, who is an instructor at the Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary, and Mr. Steven Urquhart, associate professor of French and Chair of the Department of modern languages, University of Lethbridge. We also welcome Mr. Albert Nolette, from the Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta. We also have with us Ms. Kate Peters, national board member of Canadian Parents for French; she is accompanied by her baby, whom I also welcome. We also have with us Ms. Victoria Wishart and Mr. Michael Tryon, from Canadian Parents for French in Alberta; Ms. Sarah Fedoration, assistant principal of the Grandin Catholic Elementary School, Edmonton Catholic Schools, and Ms. Tamie Beattie, the French program coordinator of the Edmonton Public School Board.

I welcome all of you.

I want to extend particular thanks to Mr. Albert Nolette, who has been in a way the organizing spirit behind this day.

I don't think I forgot anyone.

We are going to proceed in the following way. You will each have five minutes at your disposal. I am going to be somewhat strict as to the length of interventions, since we want to be able to hear all of you. If some of you take too much time, others will have less. That is why you should try to limit yourselves to five minutes. If you go over your time, I will let you know. We will hear all of you, and then the members of the committee will take part with you in a comments and questions period.

I thank you for taking part in this meeting.

We will begin immediately with Ms. Martine Cavanagh.

• (1410)

**Ms. Martine Cavanagh (Professor, Campus Saint-Jean, University of Alberta, As an Individual):** Thank you for your invitation to testify.

I want to present my particular perspective on Alberta's linguistic landscape, and focus on what I know best through my work as vice-dean of education of the Campus Saint-Jean of the University of Alberta: the training of French-language educators for immersion programs and French-language schools.

First I want to say a few words on the basic situation, which is expressed in a current trend. As you probably already know, immersion programs and French-language schools are increasingly popular in Alberta and in western Canada. Allow me to quote a few

figures to give you some idea. There are at this time 46,000 students who are registered in immersion programs, which represents approximately 6.6% of the total student population, and there are approximately 8,000 students registered in French-language schools. In 15 years registrations in immersion programs increased by 50%, and those in French-language schools almost doubled. The statistics indicate that this upward trend will continue over the next 20 years.

Aside from the figures, I would like to insist on the fact that we are experiencing an unprecedented situation. There are several reasons that explain this interest in French immersion programs and French-language schools.

Among those reasons is the fact that anglophones and allophone immigrants are more aware of the advantages of bilingualism, culturally, intellectually, and socio-economically.

There is another factor, which is that the second generation of immersion graduates do not need to be convinced of the benefits of bilingualism, and they register their children in immersion schools so that they may have access to the same opportunities they did.

There is also a migration of francophones from the east of the country toward the west, especially to Alberta, which has increased markedly over the past few years.

Finally, immigration from the francophone countries of Africa has increased very rapidly in Alberta over the past years.

Consequently, there is a new challenge for us, for Albertan francophonie, and for our institution.

I now want to speak about our place in the overall picture, as a francophone establishment.

Currently, the Campus Saint-Jean educator training program is not meeting the demand for French-language teachers. Indeed, only one position out of four is staffed by our institution. Every year, the schools of the French-language school boards and those that offer French immersion programs turn to the eastern provinces, and recently to foreign countries, countries like France, to find qualified teachers. The rapid increase in registrations in French-language schools and French immersion schools has led to a severe shortage of qualified teachers to work in those two educational contexts, especially in the western provinces.

However, there is a glimmer of hope. There are two sources of potential solutions. We have an increasing number of students at Campus Saint-Jean who come from immersion programs and want to become teachers in immersions schools. We also have an increasing number of students from the African francophone diaspora.



The current situation presents four challenges. In addition to the training challenge the Faculty of Education must meet at Campus Saint-Jean, we face three other major challenges. The first is that we must guarantee the linguistic competency of our students from immersion and French as a second language programs. Our second challenge is to guarantee the cultural competency of our African immigrant students. Finally, the third one is to meet the continuous demand for francophone school administrators.

This what we propose to meet these three challenges.

Regarding the development of language skills, we have to develop effective evaluation tools, put in place effective language support measures throughout the program, and develop courses that are well adapted to the students' various needs.

Insofar as cultural competency is concerned, we have to create a bridging program to familiarize people with the Canadian school context before they join the training program. That program is essential to ensure the successful social integration of francophone newcomers, women in particular, who make up a large percentage of our student population. We must also put in place measures to support students during the training program and during their placements. We also have to develop training for teachers who welcome student teachers into their classrooms.

As for as school administrators, we have to create a range of on-line school administration courses, the objectives of which would be aligned with the new quality standard for school leadership. These courses would lead to a certificate, which could then lead to obtaining a master's in education.

● (1415)

Putting these measures in place requires considerable financial means. The needs keep increasing, but the resources keep dwindling. As an example, the budget of the practice service, which manages the placements of our student teachers, has gone from \$600,000 in 2012 to \$200,000 in 2017. This drop means that we cannot go forward with the bridging program, the support and guidance programs; this particularly impacts immigrant women, who see their chances of having access to an educator's job dwindle.

In conclusion, education is a key element in promoting bilingualism in western Canada. The educator training program at Campus Saint-Jean has an essential role to play in this project. We are developing the vision and measures necessary to meet the challenge, and we invite the federal government to co-operate in their implementation.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Madam Vice-Dean of Education of Campus Saint-Jean, University of Alberta.

We now yield the floor to Ms. Katherine Mueller.

[English]

Katherine is from the Werklund School of Education at the University of Calgary.

[Translation]

**Dr. Katherine Mueller (Instructor, Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary, As an Individual):** Thank you.

[English]

It's my pleasure to speak to you today in my capacity as an instructor of French pre-service teachers in the Bachelor of Education program at the Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary. I teach the French specialization courses for teacher candidates who are pursuing their Bachelor of Education degree specializing in teaching French immersion and French as a second language, and in francophone context.

In addition, for several years I've been involved in the practicum placements of the French candidates and have supervised them during their first year in practicum.

I will be happy to speak to issues regarding the training of FSL and French immersion educators and to the programs available in the Calgary context.

The Bachelor of Education program at the Werklund School of Education is an award-winning B.Ed. program. We offer various pathways for students to obtain their teaching credentials including a two-year B.Ed. after degree.

In the French specialization courses, we focus on research-based pedagogy to provide solid training and professional development to our future teachers of French. At the Werklund School we graduate approximately 20 teachers of French each year. Of those, approximately 90% are hired immediately following graduation. Most teach in the Calgary area for the Calgary Board of Education, the Calgary Separate School District, Rocky View Schools division, Foothills School Division, private schools in the area, and the Conseil scolaire FrancoSud.

About half of our teacher candidates this year are native speakers of French coming to us from France, Quebec, francophone communities elsewhere in Canada, and other countries in the Francophonie. The remaining candidates who come to our program are themselves second language learners of French either from French immersion or from a French as a second language program. Because of the configuration of our program, the French pre-service teachers remain together as a cohort for several courses over the two years, which allows them to develop a strong professional community.

The Werklund School of Education maintains close and frequent contact with schools and school divisions in our area, and we endeavour to be aware of school needs and to respond to them to ensure that the teacher preparation we provide is responsive to current classroom realities.

It is crucial to create and maintain strong links between university teacher education programs and the schools that welcome our pre-service teachers as practicum students. We foster these relationships so that what we teach to our French pre-service teachers is what they will need in French as a second language and French immersion classrooms.

The need for highly trained French immersion and French as a second language teachers is growing in the Calgary area, and we continue to actively recruit new candidates.

I do have several observations about the state of French language education in the Calgary context, again in my capacity as a university instructor of pre-service teachers.

First, schools in Calgary and area offer French immersion programs, both early entry—that is, preschool, kindergarten, or grade 1—and late French immersion, which has grade 7 entry. We offer French as a second language in various configurations, and programs for francophone students. In addition, there are currently three schools in the Calgary Board of Education that offer intensive French as their approach for the delivery of FSL.

Second, research partnerships between the University of Calgary and our local school boards have resulted in productive relationships and useful insights about the delivery of French language instruction to the benefit of the university teacher preparation program and of practising teachers in the classroom.

For example, I've been involved since 2012 in a longitudinal study with the Calgary Board of Education investigating strategies for developing oral language and academic language in FSL and French immersion classrooms. I've worked with the CBE to provide a week-long professional learning opportunity for up to 80 FSL and French immersion teachers each summer for the past five years.

Next, it is highly desirable to offer French as a second language programs and French immersion to young children. We know from the considerable body of research in this area that young children are particularly responsive to second language instruction. Given the opportunity, students can continue in French throughout their school career and be successful language learners.

The Alberta government is a strong supporter of French language education, and French immersion programs in Calgary continue to be very popular. However, not all schools within the Calgary Board of Education offer the French as a second language option. To my knowledge, the decision to offer FSL in any school in the Calgary Board of Education is made by the school administration in consultation with and in response to demand by the parent community.

In addition, it can be challenging for children to continue their FSL or French immersion studies in some neighbourhoods where students might complete elementary school French and not have access to a junior high program in their area. A recent situation has been distressing for French immersion educators and administrators in Calgary. French immersion and other programs have been designated as alternative programs by the Calgary Board of Education due to the high cost of providing transportation to children who have chosen a program outside of their neighbourhood.

As a result, busing is not available to French immersion students in that board, forcing parents to put their children on public transit or to arrange alternate transportation if they wish their children to receive French immersion education. I'm aware that there has been some attrition in the French immersion program at the Calgary Board of Education as a result of this decision. It is distressing that financial constraints cause schools to relegate French programming to alternate status or to dispense with it altogether.

In my work with reserivist teachers and with teachers of French as a second language and French immersion, in both practicum and

research contexts, I've had the opportunity to talk with teachers on the front lines and to learn about their challenges. One of the predominant themes that has emerged is the lack of educational materials and resources available for French immersion teachers. Many of the teachers create their own resources or use resources created for francophones.

It is crucial that we recognize that French immersion or FSL pedagogical approaches differ greatly from the francophone first language context, and it's important that teachers of both French as a second language and French immersion have the means to access specialized materials and resources to support their programs. It is also incumbent upon us to ensure that pedagogical materials are being developed for the Canadian context.

• (1420)

**The Chair:** Katherine, I would ask you to continue what you have to say in responding to questions or comments from the members.

**Dr. Katherine Mueller:** Certainly.

**The Chair:** We have to go to Steven now.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Steven Urquhart (Associate professor of French and Chair of the Department of Modern Languages, University of Lethbridge, As an Individual):** Good afternoon.

I too am going to speak English.

[*English*]

Thank you for inviting me to this session. I am the chair of modern languages at the University of Lethbridge, an associate professor of French, and director of the French Language Centre, the FLC, at U of L, which is funded by the Canadian Official Languages in Education Protocol, COLEP. Before going further I would just like to say that I'm a little sad to be the only representative here from southern Alberta. I know Calgary is in the south, but the south also includes Medicine Hat, of course. Remarks from French consultants from these important cities two hours south of Calgary would also be important to your report.

As a French professor and the director of the FLC, I know the members of the French-speaking and francophile community in the south. My kids are at the École Lavérendrye and the FLC works with l'ACFA and Cinémagine on various French-language-oriented projects. My wife is the *conseillère pédagogique* for the Catholic school board in Lethbridge, and we collectively know many of the French teachers on the public board. These are at times former University of Lethbridge students and then correctors for the DELF French language competency tests that the centre offers to university students, called the *tous publics*, and to grade school pupils, called the *junior*.

I feel like the various francophone parties, the École Lavérendrye, l'ACFA, Cinémagine, and the FLC are increasingly working collaboratively on events and projects. We have a *concours de courts métrages*, a *semaine du film francophone*, translation projects, etc. in the area, and have been doing this for some years—I think about four. I find there is, however, still a disconnect between the university, the French-speaking community, and school boards. The money funding the FLC has helped promote French on the campus, attract and retain students, and rally those interested in French in the city and the immediate region.

I'm very appreciative of the federal funding. Student enrolment in French at the university is somewhat down, so promotion of French is still needed via pressure to make French mandatory for a university degree in English-speaking Canada, for example.

This being said, the funding is making a difference, creating greater interest in French in Lethbridge and Medicine Hat, where we also offer DELF tests and manage a group of correctors that includes teachers and two college professors.

In terms of concerns and recommendations, I am concerned with the competency level of non-native French-speaking teachers graduating French students in FLS and immersion programs. I feel they transmit errors of all sorts to elementary and high school students. This is coming from, obviously, a native anglophone speaker. In order to help those lacking exposure to French, the FLC, for example, has piloted remedial sessions—*ateliers de perfectionnement*. However, having more francophone teachers and mentors, French Canadian language assistants, and continuing education opportunities for non-native speakers to improve or *peaufiner* their French is badly needed, at least in the south.

Opportunities to receive intensive doses of French are needed, as university courses often lack this dimension due to lack of funding, time, and staff. This applies, in my opinion, to elementary and primary schools too. Paid immersion stays, city and school twinnings, trips, exchanges, and correspondences with schools in Quebec and elsewhere, such as in Acadia, would be great for immersion students and universities. Facilitating and formalizing such relationships is imperative to the survival, prosperity, and quality of French in southern Alberta in my opinion.

Jobs also need to be created to establish such connections. This cannot be asked of teachers, who already have onerous teaching duties. We need someone to organize these things.

Funds targeted towards setting up school and university radio activities, YouTube channels, conversation groups, poetry competitions, spelling bees, *dictées*, and translation studies at U of L would be great. Translation and intercultural competency are important avenues of interest for students, and they seem to be underdeveloped, at least in the south.

The Quebec-Alberta work exchange that used to exist was unfortunately cancelled some years ago. This was a great idea. Piloting and establishing a subsidized French Explore-type program or continuing education program at U of L, in coordination with l'ACFA and others in Lethbridge, would promote learning French outside of the classroom in the south. I know these exist elsewhere, but in the south they don't.

In southern Alberta we must create desire, not just duty, towards all things French, by promoting French Canada, its history, and its presence in the region—we have the *coulée* in Lethbridge, for example—and combat the idea that Quebec French or Canadian French is poor. I hear this all the time. Promoting French via anglophones having learned French with good jobs and life opportunities seems key to me.

Finally, promoting French alongside native languages and cultures in the region—as we have the largest reserve in Canada right next to Lethbridge—seems logical to me. Both are minorities, and both are neglected and treated in the same way, with varying degrees of disdain.

• (1425)

Thank you. There is no magic bullet for this. I realize that, but I think my opinions reflect those of my colleagues.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Urquhart.

Mr. Nolette, you already gave a presentation this morning, but now you are going to speak to us about this this afternoon's topic.

You have the floor.

• (1430)

**Mr. Albert Nolette:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank you again for inviting us to testify in the context of this study on French and English as a second-language programs.

Founded in 1926, the mission of the Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta, ACFA, is to defend the gains of the Albertan francophone community, to promote its rights and further its vitality. It represents 268,640 French-speaking Albertans, and speaks for them on issues that impact the Albertan francophonie.

In the context of this study, I would like to focus on these three main points: acquiring an official status for French immersion programs; obtaining support for Campus Saint-Jean so that it can respond to the shortage of French-language teachers; creating closer links between the francophone communities and French learners.

Regarding the first point, acquiring an official status for French immersion programs, I want to point out that ACFA is preparing a brief which it will soon submit to the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages in the context of its vast study on the modernization of the Official Languages Act. ACFA wants to contribute a novel idea by proposing that a new education clause be included in the Official Languages Act to confirm the official status of French immersion programs and propose a framework for the federal government's financial contribution to the teaching of French as a second language.

In order to explain my suggestion, I would like to describe a situation which occurred recently in Alberta; Ms. Mueller spoke about it earlier.

Last June, a Calgary school board made the decision to charge parents who wished to send their children to French immersion school for bus transportation, under the pretext that this was an optional program. Since the parents could not afford it, some of them had to remove their children from that program.

ACFA feels that this situation is untenable. If linguistic duality is one of this country's fundamental values, and Minister Morneau repeated this Tuesday when he presented Budget 2018, French immersion must be viewed as a basic program allowing us to train Canadian citizens who will be able to think, express themselves, and work in both official languages.

Thanks to Albertan parents who fought for their rights, French-language education is now protected and enshrined in section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which has lent considerable support to the vitality of francophone and Acadian communities from one end of the country to the other. We firmly believe that the time has come for French immersion programs to also benefit from official status, protection and a framework, and the Official Languages Act could be the proper place for the integration of that change. It will be our pleasure to share this important part of our brief once it has been finalized and tabled.

The second point of my presentation discusses support for Campus Saint-Jean at the University of Alberta.

Campus Saint-Jean is the only French-language post-secondary institution in the province. It is therefore of capital importance for the francophone community of Alberta. There is an increasing demand for bilingual workers, particularly for qualified teachers to teach in primary and secondary French-language schools. Unfortunately, the activities and capital assets of Campus Saint-Jean are chronically underfunded, and it does not have sufficient autonomy to meet specific needs. And so, in order to deal with the shortage of French-language teachers, the federal government could work with our community, the University of Alberta and the Albertan government to find specific solutions to remedy the precarious situation of Campus Saint-Jean.

My last point is the rapprochement between the francophone communities and those who are learning French.

Last summer, the ACFA concluded an agreement with Canadian Parents for French of Alberta in order to develop closer links and promote the French language and the advantages of official bilin-

gualism. This type of co-operation is particularly important in the current context.

Today more than ever, graduates and students who study in French Immersion programs can dream about promising careers. The adoption of a French language policy by the Government of Alberta and this morning's proclamation which recognizes the month of March as the annual month of Albertan francophonie are jesters that normalize the French fact and increase the possibilities of living, working and thriving in French in Alberta.

• (1435)

However, the responsibilities in this file are shared by our provincial government, which really does not have any official linguistic obligations except for a few exceptions, and the federal government. It is thus important that the federal government play a role in awareness-raising, persuasion and leadership in order to respond to the issues raised, because ultimately Canadian citizens as a whole are affected by this.

It is with a great deal of respect that we submit these avenues of reflexion. I thank you for your attention. I am ready to answer your questions.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much for this presentation, Mr. Nollette.

We will now hear Ms. Peters who is a national board member of Canadian Parents for French.

Ms. Peters, you are accompanied by the youngest witness we have ever had before the committee. I think your daughter Anne is only a few weeks old.

**Ms. Kate Peters (National Board Member, Canadian Parents for French):** Quite so. Anne is sleeping and so I'm going to speak for her.

[English]

I asked if I could speak today because I'm a board member of the national Canadian Parents for French. However, I can also speak from the perspective of a life long learner of French, a co-parent of a rights holder, and a member of the minority language community here in Alberta. I am also proud to be one of the 6.6% of Canadians who speak French outside of Quebec, so I will be presenting remarks in both official languages today.

[Translation]

My colleague Martine Cavanagh presented statistics on the French as a second language programs here in Alberta. I'm not going to go back to that topic, nor will I speak about the programs offered at the Campus Saint-Jean since Ms. Mueller spoke to you about the programs offered at the University of Calgary.

I would add that since 2014, the University of Alberta is also offering college level training. Moreover, training for adults and continuous training are offered everywhere in the province through non-accredited programs. Courses are offered by the University of Lethbridge, the University of Calgary and the University of Alberta, as well as the Alliances françaises.

I was able to benefit from several of these French as a second language programs during my studies. When I was 15, for instance, I took an optional basic French course, which I hated. I also took courses at the University of Calgary during my university studies. In addition, I also benefited from events offered in French by the francophone community, where I was able to practice my French, and met my husband.

This brief picture shows how diverse the offer of French as a second language programs is here in Alberta. I would like to add that I am very grateful that I was able to take these courses in Alberta. A lot of these programs are funded by the roadmap.

That being said, I agree with the previous speakers who said that a lot of work still needs to be done to support bilingualism here in Canada, as well as French as a second language programs.

[*English*]

Canadian Parents for French advocates for universal access to FSL programs. In Alberta and across Canada we could not say there is universal access. Whether it be lack of places in immersion programs, insufficient core French instruction, or the need for additional post-secondary language programs, as my colleagues have spoken to, access to FSL programs currently does not allow all Canadians to meet their language learning goals.

In particular, as the parent of a young child, I would like to stress the importance of early FSL learning. Research shows that the ideal entry point for immersion programs is an early immersion program and, as someone who learned French as an adult, I definitely agree with that. I know how important it is to capitalize on those early learning opportunities and yet as a parent I struggle to access them.

Quality of FSL programs is also a priority of Canadian Parents for French, and in particular CPF observes that FSL programs do not provide equitable access to appropriate academic support, especially for academically challenged students and new Canadians. This could be addressed through funding for additional classroom support, or by addressing the lack of pre- and in-service professional development opportunities. I agree with my colleague's ideas about possibilities for training.

Quality is also measured in the high attrition rates we see in immersion and core French programs at the higher level. Students become discouraged and disinterested by the lack of opportunity to communicate in an authentic language context, and I certainly felt that in grade 10 French.

I love Steven's ideas for authentic communication experiences, and research certainly does show that's how to keep students engaged. Quality can also be demonstrated by official recognition of FSL learning. CPF advocates for recognized proficiency levels, such as the common European framework of reference and French-language proficiency testing such as the DELF. Steven spoke to that. I am a DELF C2 diploma-holder myself. I can certainly speak to the value of that as a French-language learner, as a French teacher, and as an employment seeker.

Finally, across the country, ministries of education lack policies to enshrine FSL programming, and my colleague has spoken to that as well. CPF advocates for accountability and leadership among

policy-makers, and I absolutely agree with the ACFA's comments in that respect.

I would hope that this committee would encourage the Minister of Canadian Heritage to collaborate with provincial and territorial authorities to encourage access for everyone, everywhere across Canada, to FSL programs and to commit to increased and sustained funding for those programs.

While I may believe that FSL should be a constitutional right, I also think the current context provides sufficient opportunities to support French as a second language programs. Section 7 of the Official Languages Act should be fully enforced.

Tuesday's budget announcement is encouraging, especially the targeted funding for the training of French teachers and the focus on early childhood education. I'm also encouraged by the recent commitment to review the regulations for official languages, for the additional funding for Young Canada Works, and the ongoing work on the renewal of the protocol for the agreements on education in the next multi-year official languages action plan.

I look forward to your questions.

● (1440)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Kate, for this presentation.

We will go now with Canadian Parents for French - Alberta with Victoria Wishart, president.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Victoria Wishart (President, Canadian Parents for French - Alberta):** Good afternoon, Senators. The members of Canadian Parents for French of Alberta thank you for your invitation.

My name is Victoria Wishart and I am the president of the Alberta branch of Canadian Parents for French. I am accompanied by Michael Tryon, the executive director of our organization.

[*English*]

Canadian Parents for French - Alberta is part of the nationwide, research-informed, volunteer organization that champions the opportunity to learn and use French for all those who call Canada home. We support and provide services to Alberta's 45,000 French immersion and 178,000 core French students.

By now you are likely well aware of our organization's history, milestones, and successes, so we won't repeat much of that information, but it is important to know that this year, in 2018, CPF Alberta is celebrating 40 years of having served Alberta's French second-language community. In the few minutes we have here today we would like to share with you a little bit about our current situation here in Alberta. We will be speaking about three of the significant challenges we think we are facing.

The first of these, and my colleagues have already touched on it, is French teacher availability.

For 18 consecutive years, French immersion enrolment has increased in almost every single school district. We know that when a new program is created, it needs at least three things: a classroom, some books, and a qualified teacher.

The responsibility to manage classroom space rests with the local school district. Whether in English or French immersion, the district administers student placement, so classroom space is normally manageable. What is beyond the control of a school district is the supply of qualified teachers. Anecdotally we are hearing that almost every school district is short of French-speaking teachers, is having challenges sourcing them, or both.

Alberta currently has one dedicated French language post-secondary institution, Campus Saint-Jean, which is training pre-service teachers. On average, they are graduating 75 eligible candidates per year. This does not even come close to meeting Alberta's demand, let alone the demand of the remainder of western and northern Canada.

We believe that the teacher shortage is now the number one reason that school districts find themselves unable to expand existing programs or to create new French immersion programs. Unfortunately, there is no formal research around this subject, but CPF Alberta and its partners are in the process of rectifying this.

We would like to speak about our top three recommendations to rectify this teacher shortage situation.

The first is to improve, expand, or offer different French immersion teacher training programs, while creating incentives for teacher training in French. The second is to create labour mobility agreements between domestic and international jurisdictions to standardize French teacher certification requirements while providing quality and qualified teacher employment opportunities in Alberta. The last is to increase authentic language immersion opportunities for post-secondary students, pre-service teachers, and teachers, by providing bursaries to encourage attendance.

The second significant challenge we face in Alberta is ensuring that French immersion is seen as a distinct and inclusive program that is officially recognized in this province and in Canada. Unlike native francophone programs, French second language programs, such as French immersion and core French, are not constitutionally guaranteed. These are considered programs of choice and are offered at the discretion of local school districts. In Alberta, there is no provincial legislation requiring school districts to offer a second language. This puts our parents in the unique position of having to lobby community by community for a program that enables their children to become proficient in both official languages.

Recent decisions at both levels of government in Alberta have caused the playing field in our province to be less level and inclusive. My colleagues touched on this earlier, but we'd like to say that from French-immersion families being financially affected by funding decisions around school transportation—this is the busing issue—to the reallocation of staff and resources that negatively impacts FSL students and programs, French immersion has had a bit of a bumpy ride in Alberta this year.

If the French second language community were to be officially recognized as being a bilingual community, not only would we be

better able to support the French first language community in its initiatives and in achieving its goals, but the way and means to address these inequities might be facilitated. This would greatly enable local parent advocates to effectively lobby for new programs where there is the demand. No child should ever be denied a French-language learning opportunity.

• (1445)

**Mr. Michael Tryon (Executive Director, Canadian Parents for French - Alberta):** The third significant challenge we face is engaging stakeholders and decision-makers about FSL education and its benefits. Promotion of official bilingualism is the key to buy-in at all levels of society, in government, in workplaces, in educational establishments, and in cultural arenas.

Decision-makers should be made accountable for setting educational policies, providing stable funding, ensuring a sufficient supply of quality and qualified official language teachers, reporting on the achievement of students and official language programs in a timely and transparent manner, and—a key point for us—facilitating parental and community stakeholder engagement in open and inclusive decision-making.

The backbone of an effective language learning program stems from the strength and leadership of its teachers. Universities and local governments within the province of Alberta should consult with other provinces and strongly consider the use and acceptance of the *Diplôme d'études en langue française*—the DELF— or a Canadian equivalent grounded in the common European framework of reference as a common assessment tool for language proficiency that is recognized worldwide.

They should also consider dedicated streams for FSL graduates entering education to become core or immersion teachers at their choice of university, and additional bursaries for education students intending to teach FSL in Alberta.

In conclusion, Canadian Parents for French understands the value of strategic partnerships that help increase the dissemination of the importance of official language promotion, and subsequently, the promotion of French as a second language programs across the country.

We've been in partnership with l'ACFA for 13 years now as well as ACCENT. We're hoping to continue that in the future. Our unique position allows us to provide the perspective of parents who value the importance of Canada's official languages and French as a second language education programs from across the country. In addition, we offer a grassroots and overarching perspective to best inform actions going forward.

We greatly appreciate all the support from the federal government over the years. We look forward to working closely with the Government of Canada and particularly with this committee as it moves forward in identifying new priorities and initiatives in the area of bilingualism by modernizing the OLA to further support rapprochement, community vitality, and exemplary government.

[*Translation*]

We thank you for this opportunity to appear before the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

I would like to make a small clarification: we are the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages.

**Mr. Michael Tryon:** Please forgive me; I read what was written in the presentation.

**The Chair:** As you know, Canadian senators are not elected. We are elected representatives of the House of Commons, who adopt budgets, among other things. I wanted to make that clarification so that there is no confusion.

We will now give the floor to Ms. Federation.

**Ms. Sarah Federation (Assistant Principal, Grandin Catholic Elementary School, Edmonton Catholic Schools):** Mr. Chair, members of the committee, my name is Sarah Federation, and I'm proud to be one of the 268,000 people who choose to live and work in French here, in Alberta. I'm delighted to be here today to speak to you about second language learning in French and, more specifically, to discuss three important considerations for expanding French immersion programming.

When I first experienced French as a second language, immersion programs had just come out. I know it doesn't show, given my youthful looks. The francophones I interacted with were so passionate about the French language that, as a young English speaker, I couldn't help but want to be a part of that wonderful community and live in French.

This year, 2018, marks my 19th year as an educator. Having spent many years working in immersion programming, I can attest to its growth and the increasing availability of high-quality French-language resources. More important than that, however, is the transformation I have seen in how people perceive the program. Initially viewed as elitist, the program is now considered accessible to everyone.

Although the program has undergone many improvements since it was created, we still have important work to do to ensure its continued growth and provide a richer cultural and language learning experience for our students. The popularity of immersion programming in Alberta is so great that we are constantly and desperately

trying to recruit more and more teachers. The French teacher shortage is a huge problem all school boards in Canada face.

Although our francophone campus, Campus Saint-Jean, produces approximately 75 teachers a year, it's not enough to fill all the vacant positions, not even in our region. If we want to keep immersion programming accessible to everyone, it is paramount that post-secondary institutions be given the financial support and long-term commitment they need to train more future second language teachers.

Adding to the shortage is the challenge around maintaining and upgrading the language skills that language teachers need. Every class needs a qualified teacher with a high level of language proficiency. However, the severe shortage of French as a second language teachers has often meant that we have had to sacrifice language quality just to put a teacher in each class.

From my own experience, I can tell you that, when I graduated, I was one of the ones who lacked the language proficiency required to teach immersion programs. Even after my training to become a teacher, I did not fully understand the tremendous responsibility parents were entrusting me with: providing their children with a quality French-language education.

I'm not the first person, nor will I be the last, to have doubts about their language skills, but the quality and continuity of our second language learning programs hinges on the importance teachers place on their ongoing French-language education. Possible solutions might be to offer teachers more learning opportunities, such as exchanges and summer programs, and to create programs that build more purposeful ties between francophone communities and immersion schools. That might help teachers continue their language education.

Flora Lewis, an American journalist, said, and I quote:

● (1450)

[*English*]

“Learning another language is not only learning different words for the same things, but learning another way to think about things.”

[*Translation*]

The cultural activities I took part in as an immersion student had me convinced that all francophones were spoon-playing lumberjacks who ate fresh maple taffy. We have to move past that perception of the old days and expose students to the richness of the French language and culture through new experiences, ones that will help them see the world through their new language lens.

Giving immersion students more diverse learning opportunities means placing more importance on building closer ties between immersion schools and the francophone community.

For instance, access to francophone theatre, dance, movies, sports, and music could open up a new world for young learners in immersion programs, while enriching their development. To facilitate those opportunities, immersion schools could work with francophone organizations in each province. Financial investments in those types of projects could encourage more young people to do as I did and use French, not just as a tool for communication, but also as a living language in their day-to-day lives.

Thank you for listening. I would be happy to answer any questions you have.

• (1455)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Sarah, for your presentation.

We will now move on to Tamie Beattie.

**Ms. Tamie Beattie (French Program Coordinator, Edmonton Public School Board):** Thank you.

Mr. Chair and Mr. Vice-Chair, ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon. My name is Tamie Beattie, and I am the French program coordinator at the Edmonton Public School Board.

I am going to continue in English.

[*English*]

I am one of many who work at the Institution for Innovation in Second Language Education, which I will refer to as IISLE. IISLE is situated at the Languages Centre at Woodcroft, which houses five language resource centres. We have regional, provincial, national, and international partnerships, and international credentialling in four languages, and we support the teaching and learning of 11 different languages.

We believe that we are the only school district in Alberta that has a second language mandate from grades 4 to 9 that is governed by a policy, as well as regulations and guidelines around language of instruction, hours of instruction, inclusion of all students, targeted teacher language proficiency, and more.

Of the 100,000 students with Edmonton public schools, 52,000 study a second language in 2018.

French immersion has two entry points: a kindergarten or grade 1 start, as well as grade 7 late French immersion. French as a second language has a grade 4 start, which is division 2, with 10 schools having a division 1 start, which starts at grade 1. We use locally developed courses as a program of study to teach the courses. Some high schools also offer a grade 10 start for students learning French as a second language for the first time.

Over 800 French immersion and French as a second language teachers currently are employed by Edmonton Public Schools. We have 4,027 students in our late French immersion program, as well as 34,934 students in French as a second language.

Students in both French programs achieve high language proficiency levels as measured by the *Diplôme d'études en langue française*, or DELF, which is an international exam. Upon completion of their programs in grade 12, FSL students will attain a B1 level, and most French immersion students will attain a B2 level.

Currently, French immersion is our most popular program. As such, we are opening two more elementary school sites next year, in the fall of 2018. Alberta, like other western provinces, has no second language mandate, thus the ability for Albertan students to access quality French language programs is limited. Without infrastructure, few in the province have access to FSL and, most especially, to French immersion. Edmonton Public Schools is an anomaly.

The following are some of our barriers and suggestions.

We receive funding from the official languages program. We need this OLEP funding, and we urge you to continue with this funding so that we can support our French programs. Without it, French programming in our district would be at risk, especially in terms of all the different opportunities that we are able to offer our students because of this funding.

Edmonton Public Schools would also like more provincial programs of study with various entry points for French as a second language, such as a kindergarten or grade 1 start and a grade 7 entry point, like the other languages. This would make it easier to meet the demand from parents and to accommodate students in junior high who have not studied French as a second language while in elementary school. This especially would help us better serve immigrants and English as a second language students who currently make up a quarter of our student population.

Transitions continue to be an issue. We only have two entry points in FSL. As mentioned, it would help if we had a program of studies in FSL and French immersion aligned with the common European framework of reference for languages, the CEFR, to better place students in programs suited to their level of proficiency in the kindergarten to grade 12 and post-secondary system. We have used OLEP funding to offer self-exams, especially to our grade 12 students, and these results are recognized at some provincial, national, and international post-secondary institutions.

Edmonton Public Schools believes it is a fundamental right of all Canadians to receive instruction in both official languages. The federal government could help by influencing funding and teacher training to ensure that all students, including new Canadians, can choose to learn both official languages.

Edmonton Public Schools works closely with CASLT, the Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers, at a national level, and the Second Languages and Intercultural Council of the Alberta Teachers' Association at the provincial level, to access current research around second language teaching and learning.



• (1500)

We use its recently published “Literature Review on the Impact of Second-Language Learning” to inform schools, students, parents, and other educational stakeholders on the positive impact of learning a second language for all students. The federal government could play a role by influencing research and by helping to promote the results of that research.

The Edmonton Public School Board also has a philosophy of inclusion: all students have a right to instruction in both official languages. A barrier to achieving this goal across the province and beyond is the persistent belief that only the most academic of students can learn a second language. The federal government should influence and share research, play a strong advocacy role, and lobby provinces to institute a second language requirement with multiple access points to ensure that students can access their right to learn both official languages.

As for the Official Languages Act, it should continue to be revised to move to include the rights of all Canadian students to learn both official languages in the kindergarten to grade 12 educational system, and to not only protect minority language rights, which must remain enshrined in the act.

Thank you so much for giving us this opportunity to voice our concerns as well as our triumphs as a school board.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Tamie.

[*Translation*]

We will now have a round of questions and comments. Each member of the committee will have six minutes.

We'll begin with Bernard Généreux.

Mr. Généreux, we'll proceed as usual, starting with introductions.

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** My name is Bernard Généreux, and I represent the Quebec riding of Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, in the Lower St. Lawrence region. La Pocatière, a town in the riding, has an agreement with Campus Saint-Jean. Ms. Federation may have come to La Pocatière to study.

I'd like to start by thanking you all for your excellent presentations. It's not easy to change my mind, but you managed to make me rethink how I look at education on a number of levels. You have had to fight to get what you want. I commend you for all you've been doing for decades to help Canada's francophone community flourish.

Ms. Federation, I really want to say kudos to you for your presentation. I still have goosebumps. Your references to the Quebec of yore certainly made me smile.

Several of you, more than once, raised the possibility of amending the act, even the Constitution. Surely, you realize that's no small feat in Canada and tends to be a rare occurrence. Many people would like to see it happen, for all sorts of reasons, but even when it does, we won't be out of the woods. That said, as you know, education is in the provincial domain. The federal government has a say, of course, but, at the end of the day, provincial jurisdiction has to be respected.

Mr. Chair, I'm not going to ask my questions straightaway. Everything we've heard from the witnesses over the past two days leads me to think that the Standing Committee on Official Languages should consider organizing a meeting in Ottawa for members of the educational community, from across the country. I think we are at that stage. Provincial education representatives should be there as well—ideally, ministers, but at least senior officials. They could tell us how Ottawa and the provinces could work together to advance the French fact across the country.

Consider this my formal request. The time has come for us to go farther. I was really moved by your remarks. Nearly everyone shed a tear today. That doesn't happen every day. We are paying very close attention to what you have to say.

The Government of Canada just added \$400 million to the upcoming roadmap. If the devil is in the details, as they say, it'll be important to see how the money is going to make its way to you—under what conditions, in what way, and so forth.

You mentioned the Official Languages Act, which will be studied over the next few months. We will no doubt have a hand in its development or, at the very least, its renewal. Any suggestions you have in that regard should be forwarded to the committee for consideration. Mr. Nolette, I believe you said you had some proposals for us.

I took many notes and have about 50,000 questions for you, especially regarding the official status you talked about.

What did you mean when you talked about the need for official status countrywide in relation to education and French immersion programs?

• (1505)

**Mr. Albert Nolette:** We are still thinking about how that official status could fit into a new version of the Official Languages Act. What's important is providing some protection for second-language learning programs, including immersion programs. As we've heard today, these programs are somewhat at risk and depend on the good faith of provincial governments, school boards, and school administrations. If the federal government could somehow extend protection under the Official Languages Act for second-language learning programs, as well as funding, it would be a major step forward. I can assure you that, as soon as we have finished our examination and put a proposal together, we'll let the committee know.

**The Chair:** Mr. Samson, you may go ahead. Please introduce yourself.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My name is Darrell Samson, and I'm from Nova Scotia. I'm the province's only Acadian representative, something I'm very proud of. Ms. Fedoration's parents are from Nova Scotia as well.

• (1510)

**Mr. René Arseneault:** She also has grandparents from New Brunswick.

**Voices:** Ha, ha!

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Education is something I'm very passionate about, having spent 31 years in the field. I worked in a number of positions, from teacher, vice-principal, and principal to supervisor, coordinator, and deputy superintendent. I spent the last 11 years of my career as superintendent of all of Nova Scotia's French-language schools. I've taught at two universities as well, so, as you can see, I've been around the block.

According to what we've heard today and over the past couple of days, the big problem with French-language education, from early childhood right through post-secondary, is section 23. It does not mention French-language education for children under the age of five or students 18 and older. That's something we need to fix somehow or, at least, find a solution to.

My questions will be short. As my fellow member Mr. Généreux so passionately mentioned, you did a good job explaining the challenges you face.

Correct me if I'm wrong, but I thought I heard you say that not all public school students have access to core French. If that's true, I'm shocked because I thought it was mandatory. If the students aren't receiving core French classes, it means that the province doesn't get the federal funding. However, money is set aside for every child taking a core French class from grade 4 on. It's automatic. A tremendous amount of money is being lost if it's not being used. Furthermore, I thought it was mandatory, but that doesn't seem to be the case. Do I understand that correctly?

**Mr. Michael Tryon:** In Alberta, it's not mandatory. It's up to each school board.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** You're referring to core French. Is that correct?

**Mr. Michael Tryon:** Yes.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** I'm shocked.

**Ms. Tamie Beattie:** The problem is not that school boards don't want to offer core French; it's that they don't have the teachers with the proficiency to teach the second language.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** I see. That's a bit different, then. Money is available for every single student, which is what matters.

Does the province have extended core French programs? In other words, are other subjects taught in French, in addition to French language classes?

**Mr. Michael Tryon:** No, not really. Only three or four school boards in the province offer intensive French classes, and only as of grade 5 or 6.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** You mean a second class.

**Mr. Michael Tryon:** Yes.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** It's a hybrid of core French and immersion available in some regions.

The shortage of teachers is well known. If, however, we had more teacher graduates, we could deal with the problem. It would be possible to give the classes. Why not just increase the number of students in the education program?

**Ms. Martine Cavanagh:** At Campus Saint-Jean, it's a matter of money, first and foremost. The university currently receives funding for 514 students. The dean is trying to secure funding for every student, but that isn't the case right now. We have 750 students, but we receive funding for only 514, so we are underfunded.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** The province should address the teacher shortage and make an investment.

**Ms. Martine Cavanagh:** Yes.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** I'd like to make another point.

It's something I think about often. It costs the same amount to teach a child core French, immersion French, French as a first language, and so on. It requires the same amount of space. Someone mentioned that earlier. You need a classroom, a teacher, and resources. That's all.

I wonder, then, why the province wouldn't want to create those spaces. The cost would be more or less the same, and I even think the Department of Canadian Heritage provides funding for immersion programs from kindergarten up to grade 12.

Ms. Fedoration, I have to pick up on something you said. You mentioned that teachers needed access to more learning opportunities, summer courses or other programs. Are you aware that the Association canadienne d'éducation de langue française, or ACELF for short—a national organization based in Quebec City—offers courses every summer? Have you ever taken any?

**Ms. Sarah Fedoration:** No, I've never taken them.

I know about the courses, but I don't think the vast majority of our teachers realize they can improve their language proficiency by going somewhere else.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** It's a wonderful program, about four weeks long, during the city's summer festival. It's really great. I went there to review the program and talk to people. Funding is available through the Ministry of Education. It doesn't cover the full cost, but the school board could cover a portion as well.

That's certainly another opportunity available to teachers.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Samson.

It is now over to Mr. Choquette.

**Mr. François Choquette:** When you do make it to Quebec City, you'll have to visit Drummondville. It's only an hour and a half away. You'll obviously have to try the poutine, which was invented in Drummondville, you know. We won that title long ago, although some still like to argue otherwise. In fact, we have a poutine festival. It's very popular, just like Les Trois Accords, a local band.

My name is François Choquette, and I am a member of the NDP and the vice-chair of this committee. I was first elected in 2011. I, too, used to be a French teacher, so, one day, I might be able to come here, to Alberta, to teach. That is unless the kids tell me they hate core French and French immersion. Then we'd have a problem.

Now I'll get to my first question. In British Columbia, we also heard that French as a second language and core French were not taught throughout the province.

What percentage of students don't take French as a second language classes or French immersion? Is it high? Does anyone know the percentage? Could someone get back to the committee with the figure?

• (1515)

**Mr. Michael Tryon:** I will forward the numbers to the committee.

**Mr. François Choquette:** Okay, thank you. It would be interesting to see the extent of the challenge here, in Alberta, and in British Columbia, where we heard the same thing.

Furthermore, in British Columbia it seems that French immersion is considered to be an elitist program. It is appalling to hear that. You talked a bit about that. It would therefore be very interesting to include this program in the offerings by changing the Official Languages Act.

You mentioned that local school boards make the decisions. Can you tell us more about that?

Earlier I heard that these district schools would perhaps want to offer these courses, but that there are not enough teachers. What exactly is the problem? Are the districts willing to do so, is there a shortage of teachers?

**Ms. Sarah Fedoration:** Our school board was going to launch two new French immersion programs two years ago. We had to eliminate one simply because we did not have enough teachers to open a kindergarten to grade 6 school. Our board cannot even offer that.

**Mr. François Choquette:** Therefore, there is a real shortage of teachers. I don't want to discuss it, but there is probably also a shortage of teachers of French as a first language for francophone students. You are looking for teachers for the French as a second language programs, but French schools want to keep their teachers. That must pose challenges and put incredible pressure on human resources.

What has happened to the Quebec-Alberta student exchange program?

**Mr. Steven Urquhart:** It was cancelled.

**Mr. François Choquette:** When was it cancelled and why?

**Mr. Steven Urquhart:** I do not know why, but it was cancelled six years ago. It was someone from Lethbridge who looked after it. They work in Edmonton.

**Mr. François Choquette:** What exactly was this program? What was its goal? Did it work well?

Is anyone somewhat familiar with the program?

**Mr. Albert Nolette:** I participated in this excellent program. It made it possible for me to spend one summer in Quebec and some Quebecers came to Alberta to improve their English.

Personally, I can say that my French really improved that summer thanks to this immersion program held in a French environment in Quebec. It was also a good work experience in French. Several of my friends and some other students from the Campus Saint-Jean also participated in this program. It is unfortunate that it no longer exists.

**Mr. François Choquette:** Was it a provincial program at the university?

**Mr. Albert Nolette:** I believe it was an interprovincial government offered by the Alberta and Quebec governments.

**Mr. François Choquette:** All right.

You mentioned the huge human resources problem.

As I have some time left, I would also like to talk about the problem of materials that are tailored to your programs, that is, French immersion and French as a second language.

Why are there no materials? That is unbelievable.

Ms. Beattie, would you like to comment on that?

• (1520)

**Ms. Tamie Beattie:** Teachers have materials. However, unlike large school boards, small school boards often do not have access to educational consultants.

We are really lucky because we have six educational consultants who are responsible for just the French component. Together with the teachers, we can create new projects and new resources, and we can provide professional development.

I would like to add that educational materials in French are often more expensive than those in English, and can even cost twice as much. In addition, the educational materials are often translated and not adapted, which is an important consideration for second language learners.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

**Ms. Tamie Beattie:** We have many French books. The level of French is geared to grade 7 students, but the content is childish. That is a problem because we are looking for authentic resources and they have to be suitable for the grade and age of the students.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Choquette.

Moving now to Manitoba, you have the floor Mr. Vandal.

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

My name is Daniel Vandal, and I am the MP for Saint-Boniface—Saint-Vital, a riding in the city of Winnipeg. I am a Métis member of Parliament and I am proud to be a member of this committee.

I would like to start by congratulating our witnesses for their commitment to education in their community and to our language.

I really appreciate what you do.

The matters that we are discussing are very broad, and we do not have much time to discuss them. We only have six minutes. I would like to give the floor back to you so that you can provide the members of the Standing Committee on Official Languages with more information in order to help us with our report. We will be presenting the report to the House of Commons so that the government can respond.

What advice do you have for us? What message do you want us to give to the department and to the government?

We have five minutes. We will start with the representative of the Edmonton Public School Board.

**Ms. Tamie Beattie:** We really need teachers who can teach French. We also want to send the message that the French immersion program is not just for the strongest students. We really have to dispel the myth that French is not for everyone. In fact, French is for all students, no matter their level of learning. It has to be inclusive. That means that, from the outset, we need people who can counsel students in French, speech pathologists, and all those people who support us in French.

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** Thank you.

Ms. Fedoration of the Edmonton Catholic Schools, you have the floor.

**Ms. Sarah Fedoration:** I would like to come back to the point raised by Mr. Nolette. French immersion students should be recognized as second language learners. For example, most of the time I speak French and rarely do I speak English. Consequently, I am not recognized as someone eligible for the program or as a bilingual person in Canada. It is important to recognize second language learners. It is also vital that we continue to offer language development opportunities for teachers and students in authentic contexts.

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** Thank you.

Mr. Tryon and Ms. Wishart of Canadian Parents for French—Alberta, you have the floor.

**Mr. Michael Tryon:** Thank you, Mr. Vandal.

I am a teacher and I also supply teach a few times a month for a rural school board north of Edmonton. It has a small immersion program in Sturgeon, which has seven teachers and about 100 students.

The challenge in rural communities is dealing with the lack of resources. We do not have access to professional development and, sometimes, we do not have access to Francophone communities, especially in the southern part of the province. Most Francophone communities in Alberta are located north of Red Deer, and there are no francophone communities in the south. There are no opportunities.

• (1525)

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** What recommendations would you like to make to the government?

**Mr. Michael Tryon:** As Ms. Fedoration said...

[English]

it is to recognize the fact that there is another community that supports French as a second language, and that some of the biggest champions of French second language education or French education are the English-speaking mothers and fathers who put their kids in French immersion and don't speak French at all.

[Translation]

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** Thank you.

Ms. Peters, you have the floor.

**Ms. Kate Peters:** With regard to the review of regulations, I believe that it is possible to identify rights holders, people like me, who come from an exogamous family and who are completely bilingual,

[English]

and to modernize the recognition of majority versus minority to be more inclusive of new Canadians who may have a second official language as their second language or third language—people like me.

I also think there's already language there. As guardians and protectors of language rights, then that could be extended to the second language.

[Translation]

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** Thank you.

Mr. Nolette, it is your turn.

**Mr. Albert Nolette:** In addition to what all my colleagues have said, I would recommend that the government invest in post-secondary education for two reasons. First, as we have heard, there are great and urgent needs that must be met. Second, this investment would support the mandate of school boards. Studies indicate that a student who has the opportunity to pursue post-secondary studies in French is probably more likely to complete grade 12. At this time, the options are limited.

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** Thank you very much.

Mr. Urquhart, you're next.

**Mr. Steven Urquhart:** I think we need to continue investing in French language instruction. Many people in the field dedicate enormous amounts of time to this issue. We also need to ensure the quality of the language. Obviously, new teachers need to be recruited, but sometimes our students have a language proficiency level that is quite low, which worries me. I am part of the problem, because I'm too kind when grading my students, so I'm contributing to this problem.

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** Thank you.

Ms. Mueller, you have the floor.

**Dr. Katherine Mueller:** I would say that we need to insist that school boards prioritize French. As I said earlier, they can choose whether or not to offer it, depending on parents' interest and budgets. I think it's shameful.

**Mr. Dan Vandal:** Okay.

Ms. Cavanagh, you have the floor.

**Ms. Martine Cavanagh:** Obviously, I'm a little biased. Investing in post-secondary education is absolutely essential. That's the key to success. We are training future teachers.

We talked about the shortages, but it's not just about the number of future teachers. It is also a question of quality.

I talked about the challenges related to language proficiency and cultural competency, because we have students in the immersion program, for example, and other students from francophone African countries who have specific and varying needs. We need resources.

I am one of only seven professors, only seven, currently in education at the Campus Saint-Jean. We need loans of service, teachers in the field who can come and meet with future teachers and share their experiences with them. This is very expensive. A loan of service costs \$120,000 a year, just to give some idea.

Investments are therefore needed in post-secondary education.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Vandal.

We will now continue with Mr. Arseneault.

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

My name is René Arseneault, and I'm the member of Parliament for Madawaska—Restigouche, in northern New Brunswick. I am a proud Acadian.

I have a lot of questions for you, but your presentations were so clear that we're beginning to get a pretty good idea of how our report might look, following our tour around western Canada.

I want to try to get away somewhat from the kinds of questions we've been asking you. I would have liked to come back to them, but I won't have time.

Yesterday we heard that in British Columbia, school boards also seem to be independent of one another, and I must say, that surprises me. There is no single curriculum used across Alberta, from north to south and east to west. That's my understanding.

Are all the school boards independent? They can decide whether or not to offer French classes. Is that right?

• (1530)

**Mr. Michael Tryon:** Yes. Every school board is truly independent. There are 62 or 63 school boards in the province. Of those, 42 offer French classes, in addition to the French school boards.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** Okay.

I understand that there are religious school boards and non-religious school boards. Is that right?

**Mr. Michael Tryon:** Yes. Here in Alberta, there are two types: public school boards and Catholic school boards.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** Do they all fall under the same ministry, the Ministry of Education?

In terms of curriculum, is there a minimum every school board must offer?

**Mr. Michael Tryon:** Yes, the provincial curriculum.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** Okay.

However, you said that school boards could choose whether or not to teach French, whether or not to offer French classes.

**Mr. Michael Tryon:** Yes, they have the choice. French is not a mandatory course; it is up to the school board.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** Okay.

Are teachers' salaries the same across all school boards, regardless of whether the school board is in the east, or whether it's an English or French school board?

**Mr. Michael Tryon:** Yes. In Alberta, the base salary is \$69,000. It's nearly the same for everyone. It's simply a question of seniority. There is no language bonus.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** Whether in Lethbridge or Saint-Albert, do all teachers at the post-secondary level earn the same salary?

**Mr. Michael Tryon:** Yes, it's nearly the same.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** Why do you say "nearly"?

**Mr. Michael Tryon:** The province negotiates primarily with the Alberta Teachers' Association, or ATA, but sometimes it negotiates with the school board.

[*English*]

By and large, though, the salary is pretty much set across the province.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. René Arseneault:** Okay.

I am asking these questions because I'm sure you're recruiting all your instructors from universities in Quebec, Acadia and Ontario. My brother taught in Yellowknife, and my daughter-in-law is in the Canadian north.

Is recruiting for instructors working? You said that even when you have the necessary financial resources, there is a shortage of human resources. Is external recruitment working?

**Ms. Martine Cavanagh:** It's not exactly the same context.

For instance, teachers who come from Quebec to teach here in Alberta must have a clear understanding of the environment. It's not easy. We would prefer to be able to train them here, so that they're more familiar with the context here.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** I understand, but you also said that you don't have enough instructors and that sometimes the language quality can be lacking.

**Ms. Martine Cavanagh:** The school boards do it. They go all over Canada to recruit teachers.

**Dr. Katherine Mueller:** It also poses a problem.

Certain school boards from here go east to hire instructors. The instructors they hire are francophone by birth, so they speak excellent French. They might come here and teach math, in immersion for example, but they aren't trained to teach immersion. They don't understand the pedagogy related to the language. They are math specialists.

I see that as one of the biggest problems.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** I understand.

Ms. Federation, go ahead.

**Ms. Sarah Federation:** I just wanted to add that while it's true that we are recruiting, retention is really hard. People often come here to have a bit of an adventure, but then they go back home.

Building capacity in our school boards is therefore becoming problematic. There is constant turnover, and we cannot keep up with training and maintaining a pool of teachers.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** That's interesting.

**Ms. Martine Cavanagh:** We need to train more teachers here in immersion education. I want to reiterate that. Teaching in immersion means teaching all subjects in French, which isn't easy. It requires specialized expertise.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** That's right. One has to be a generalist, and not specialize in a particular subject.

**Ms. Martine Cavanagh:** One also has to know how to integrate the language into the various disciplines and how to teach the language and the discipline at the same time.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** Ms. Cavanagh, earlier you mentioned funding for 514 students.

**Ms. Martine Cavanagh:** That's for Campus Saint-Jean.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** That's only for Campus Saint-Jean.

Is there demand for the post-secondary education you offer at Campus Saint-Jean?

**Ms. Martine Cavanagh:** Are you asking me whether there is a demand for teachers?

**Mr. René Arseneault:** Yes.

**Ms. Martine Cavanagh:** Yes, enrolment is on the rise.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** However, you've run out of room. Is that right?

**Ms. Martine Cavanagh:** That's right. First of all, we don't have the financial resources needed. There's also a huge problem of lack of space. Given that we need to offer practical training, we have to set limits, for instance 25 students per class, to send them to schools. We therefore have to increase the number of sections. We really don't have enough space.

• (1535)

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, but I have to interrupt you.

Ms. Boucher, you have the floor.

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher:** Hello. My name is Sylvie Boucher and I'm a member of Parliament from the Quebec City area, specifically the member for Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix. In other words, I represent the most beautiful riding in

Quebec. Under the previous government, I was the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Status of Women, and Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages.

I find this trip both very relevant and very troubling. Let me explain. I'm a humble girl from Quebec City, and we've always been told that Quebecers are the fighters and that there are no francophones outside the province. All the francophones are supposedly concentrated in Quebec. Over the past two days, witnesses have been saying that native-born Quebecers are not helping them very much, that their contact with Quebec governments at any level has been rather limited and that Quebecers don't care about supporting the francophonie.

That said, we have talked a lot about school boards and instructors. As everyone knows, education is a provincial responsibility. I have a few questions for you.

Why can you not find people willing to invest in the francophonie? Why is it so hard to find instructors?

Mr. Arseneault asked whether you recruit instructors from outside the province. You said yes, but specified that you prefer to train them here. I agree with that 100%, but why can you not find any? What is the problem?

**Dr. Katherine Mueller:** I am going to answer in English.

[*English*]

It's a vicious circle, I think. I have pre-service candidates who come to me all the time who want to be French teachers, but they say they don't think their French is good enough. We do what we can to provide extra opportunities to give them enrichment in the language. I provide all kinds of clubs and so on to help them speak French every day.

Then they go for interviews, and they are told by the school that their French isn't good enough for immersion, and they'll put you in FSL. For me, that's a crime, because FSL, core French, needs as high quality as immersion does. They are getting in there, and they are teaching, or they are not hired because their French isn't good enough. Word gets out that your French isn't good enough, so don't bother trying.

Unless we can improve the quality of French in the schools as they are coming up towards university, they won't be ready to go out and become teachers.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher:** Ms. Federation, earlier you mentioned doubts about language skills. What did you mean by that? Are people embarrassed to speak French because they don't speak it perfectly or fluently?

That's how I speak English, but that doesn't mean I should be embarrassed.

**Dr. Katherine Mueller:** I'm not sure if you read the book written by the former commissioner Graham Fraser, but he addresses this phenomenon.

There was a group of students from the Ontario city of Kingston, where I'm from, who learned French in an immersion program, but when they went on a school trip to Quebec City, they were too embarrassed to speak the French they learned in Kingston, in their immersion program.

• (1540)

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher:** They should not have been embarrassed to speak French in Quebec.

**Ms. Sarah Fedoration:** Indeed. A number of times, when I would speak French, especially in Quebec or Ontario, people would respond in English. Every time I speak French—

Now I live my life in French every day, here, in Alberta. My friends are francophone and I work in French, but when I leave the province—

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher:** People speak to you in English.

**Ms. Sarah Fedoration:** Yes, and it's really sad, considering how long I spent studying French and becoming proficient. People correct me and sometimes make fun of my accent. It's completely normal to feel like this.

I used to work at the ministry. It's sometimes hard to interact with people who come from other provinces and speak French so fluently. In those situations, we feel embarrassed because we're professionals, and yet we can't say a sentence without making a mis-

take. I think the same thing happens wherever we travel, regardless of the country. Speaking with francophones is intimidating.

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher:** But you should never feel that way.

**The Chair:** Mr. Généreux is asking for the floor for two seconds.

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** You should come to La Pocatière. In fact, I urge all my colleagues not to go to cities like Quebec City to learn French, because there are too many English-speaking tourists. There is only one person in La Pocatière who speaks English, and that's my wife. So there's no risk.

I'm joking, but the point is, it's a lot easier to learn French in a truly francophone region, especially a rural area, than in a tourist region. No one should be afraid to speak the other language.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Généreux.

That concludes our meeting today in Edmonton.

Your contributions will be invaluable to our report. On behalf of all my colleagues, I thank you very much for this discussion and dialogue.

Please don't leave right away. I would ask members to move to the back so we can take a group photo.

The meeting is adjourned.

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