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• (1105)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 114 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages. I will of course review the guidelines for preventing acoustic incidents. Please place your earpiece on the table when you speak. There is a card on the table indicating steps to be taken to prevent acoustic incidents that may injure our interpreters, whom we really need. We mustn't make the situation worse, so please follow the guidelines.

A reminder, before I introduce the witnesses, that, for technical reasons, I adjourned the last meeting as though I was suspending it. We were already voting on Mr. Godin's motion, which our clerk has sent you once again for efficiency's sake. I know you remember because that was this past Tuesday. At any event, you have before you the motion that Mr. Godin tabled on Tuesday and that we will be putting to a vote. We will do that by a public show of hands, if there are no objections.

(Motion negatived: nays 6; yeas 5 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*]).

The Chair: Now let's get down to business with the witnesses in attendance. Just a reminder that we are still studying the minority-language education continuum.

I would like to welcome the witnesses who are here with us and the others who are participating virtually in today's meeting. We have some prominent visitors, including two representatives from the Fédération des conseils d'éducation du Nouveau-Brunswick, Chantal Ouellette, who is administrative manager for the francophone sector of the District Education Councils; and Robert Levesque, who is a member of that federation. Both are participating in this meeting by video conference. I remember that Mr. Levesque has previously appeared before this committee.

We also have Ghislain Bernard, who is general manager of the Commission scolaire de langue française de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard, and Brad Samson, who is director of administrative and financial services.

Each organization will have five minutes for its presentation. I am strict about that. You will have five minutes and no more. Then there will be a series of questions and answers.

So welcome to you all.

Mrs. Ouellette, the floor is yours for exactly five minutes.

Ms. Chantal Ouellette (Administrative Manager, District Education Councils (Francophone Sector), Fédération des conseils d'éducation du Nouveau-Brunswick): All right.

First, I would like to discuss access to early childhood services. Preschool programs must occupy a prominent position in the article 23 project under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in order to maintain the minority language and culture. There is a shortage of spaces in French-language educational day care facilities, particularly for children 0 to 2 years of age, as a result of which parents are entitled to enrol their children in English-language day care centres. We are requesting an increase in available funding to create spaces in French-language educational day care centres.

Rural regions that do not have accredited educational day care services also need more funding, and incentives must be established so that such services can be made available to the francophone community in regions where English dominates.

Now let's discuss language upgrading and francization. Preschool programs are essential to the subsequent academic success of children and adolescents. When preschool-age children are enrolled at English-language educational day care services, francization services will be necessary from the moment they enter kindergarten. Currently, an average of two and a half hours of language proficiency upgrading is offered at the early childhood level, and that is not enough. We are therefore requesting increased funding so we can offer more language proficiency upgrading at the early childhood level to promote children's academic success.

According to the 2021 census, 11,070 children aged 0 to 4 years of age were eligible for official language minority instruction in New Brunswick, whereas 5,617 spaces at accredited day care facilities were available for those children in 2021–2022. Also according to census data, 49% of the 5,453 children who were eligible for francophone instruction did not have access to francophone educational day care services.

Furthermore, funding obtained by the official languages in education program, or OLEP, is important for minority language primary and secondary schools. However, the increase received from the official languages support programs, or OLSP, is clearly insufficient and prevents the federal government from meeting its official language obligations. We are requesting increased OLEP funding so we can meet the increasing needs of the minority language education system.

Funding for language upgrading at the primary and secondary levels is also inadequate. Language upgrading in rural regions, regions where English dominates and regions taking in large numbers of immigrant students is inadequate as well. The sharp rise in the number of immigrant students causes significant pressure and imbalance. That pressure should continue because Canada will continue focusing on immigration in the coming years. Consequently, we request increased funding for language upgrading so we can work with immigrant students as soon as they enter the schools. We are also seeking more funding to provide academic personnel with the necessary resources and knowledge to ensure that children are properly welcomed and can achieve academic success. Lastly, we are requesting funding so we can provide welcome and support services for the families of rights-holder parents and immigrant families to enable them to support their children on their learning journey.

We must also address the issue of inadequate and obsolete school infrastructure. The condition of a school has a direct impact on students' success. In 2020, New Brunswick's auditor general estimated that 62% of New Brunswick schools were, on average, 40 or more years old. Statistics Canada estimates that the lifespan of educational buildings is approximately 40 years. Significant investment will therefore be required to maintain, renovate or replace New Brunswick schools over the next few years.

The recent influx of immigrant students has also put additional pressure on school infrastructure. For many years now, for example, the District scolaire francophone Sud has requested new school infrastructure in the Saint John region to meet the needs of the francophone community. The Centre scolaire Samuel-de-Champlain and the École des Pionniers are the only two schools in the Saint John area.

• (1110)

In 2021, they had 919 students, whereas, according to Census 2021, a minimum of 2,155 students could attend those schools. Consequently, 1,236 students in that region of the province are not attending a French-language school.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Ouellette.

You will be able to say more in response to the questions you are asked.

I now turn the floor over to Mr. Bernard. You also have five minutes.

Mr. Ghislain Bernard (Director General, Commission scolaire de langue française de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard): I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to appear here today and to address your committee.

First of all, allow me to thank you sincerely for your invitation. I am very pleased to testify as part of your study on the minority-language education continuum.

I would like to express my gratitude to the members of this committee for their commitment to the protection and promotion of Canada's official languages.

In acknowledging the importance of minority-language education programs, the federal government plays an essential role in

sustaining our francophone community, which, as on Prince Edward Island, is a minority community.

First of all, I would like to underscore the close and positive co-operation we enjoy with the provincial government of Prince Edward Island. That co-operation is vitally important because it enables us to meet certain challenges that we face as a francophone minority community. Despite those good relations, we know that the challenges are many and our situation unique.

Access to funding from the official languages in education program, or OLEP, is one of the pillars of our survival. That program plays a key role in the development and preservation of French-language education in our province. To be clear, without this agreement, our francophone schools and community educational centres would not even exist.

Although the provincial government relies on principles of equality in assessing educational needs, the agreement with OLEP constitutes an essential framework in achieving equity. Thanks to this agreement, it is possible to adopt policies and resources in order to meet the specific needs of all students, thus contributing to a more equitable and inclusive educational system. This distinction is essential because equality means providing the same resources for everyone, whereas equity means adjusting those resources in accordance with the specific needs of each person. The difference is critically important in our case because our situation as a francophone minority community is a special one.

Many of our francophone schools are small and scattered across various parts of Prince Edward Island, and their mission far exceeds that of mere educational institutions. They are also community school centres, places where our children learn, but also where the community gathers to live in French. That mission entails unique logistical, organizational and pedagogical challenges that anglophone majority schools face very rarely or not at all.

The current funding formulas clearly put our members at a disadvantage, thus limiting their ability to provide our students with French-language instruction of quality equivalent to that offered to the anglophone majority and in immersion programs. Although our needs are growing, federal funding under the official languages in education program, or OLEP, is still not enough for the Commission scolaire de langue française de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard, the CSLF, for example, to guarantee equity with the majority language education system.

In the meantime, the cost of living is constantly rising, as is the number of students at our schools. This leaves us in a situation where it is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain the models of a high-quality francophone education.

Our francophone students, in many instances, are more geographically isolated, a fact that complicates the introduction of appropriate programs such as francization. This dispersion also makes it harder to recruit and retain teachers because the talent pool is small. As a result, efforts to achieve mere equality with anglophone schools disregard these facts. We need appropriate support, a model that acknowledges these challenges and that enables us to operate on an equal footing, and especially on an equitable model.

The restorative aspect of section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms means that many rights holders enter our francophone schools with low levels of proficiency in French. Our teachers must therefore adjust curricula to include additional francization work. This requires increased individual support. This francization effort must be acknowledged because it means additional work for teachers and has a direct impact on the quality of the education that we offer our students.

To guarantee that all students receive the support they require to learn French, we need to be able to adjust funding ratios and criteria in accordance with our specific needs. It is essential that funding models reflect this unique situation because only by acknowledging these specific characteristics can we provide a high-quality education to our francophone students and ensure their academic and cultural success.

The fact that our francophone schools are scattered across Prince Edward Island makes our organization more complex. This logistical challenge weighs heavily on our ability to recruit both students and skilled teachers. The distance between homes and schools often undermines access to French-language education for certain families.

• (1115)

Bus travel, which can be long and restrictive, further complicates the situation. For some students, long daily bus rides are a major obstacle to their academic development.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bernard. I know you had more to say, but, as you will see, you will be able to add more information in response to the upcoming excellent questions.

As you are new here, I would inform you that the first round of questions will be six minutes long for each political party. It's a period of interaction in the form of questions and answers.

We will begin with a Franco-Albertan who is now living in British Columbia.

Mr. Dalton, the floor is yours for six minutes.

Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thanks as well to the witnesses for the information they're providing us.

My question is for the representatives of the Commission scolaire de langue française de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard.

I see that your budget increased significantly until 2013 and then plateaued. According to our information, you received \$12 million from the Department of Canadian Heritage in 2023, but that amount has remained the same since 2008.

Is that information accurate? Is this situation increasingly causing you problems?

Mr. Brad Samson (Director of Administrative and Financial Services, Commission scolaire de langue française de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard): The \$12 million was probably provided under a four-year agreement; it isn't paid out every year.

Mr. Marc Dalton: I see.

Mr. Brad Samson: As I remember, in Prince Edward Island, \$2.6 million or something like that is paid annually for French, as an official language minority language, and for French as a second language. There was an increase of approximately \$200,000 last year.

As for the stability of that amount, you should know that every province has a different basic formula, a staffing and funding formula. That's what concerns the school board first and foremost.

I know that, in certain provinces, the formula takes francophone factors into account. There may also be support for little schools in the provincial formula outside the official languages in education program, or OLEP. There are no such factors in Prince Edward Island.

Under the agreement, we fund what we consider are basic services. Rightly or wrongly, that's our situation. We use the funding for purposes somewhat different from what we would like. However, the funding that's there has really been linked to existing resources for many years. It's hard to make changes to the way that funding is used because we could lose resources in the classrooms, for example.

I know that the agreement addresses student retention, for example. However, student retention in Prince Edward Island means that we have a teacher in a classroom who is funded under OLEP. That enables us to offer a fourth year in one province.

• (1120)

Mr. Marc Dalton: What percentage of your francophone school board's schools budget comes from the federal level compared to the provincial contribution?

Mr. Brad Samson: Most of the school board's funding comes from the provincial government. As for the schools aspect, we mostly have the necessary infrastructure, but the community preschool aspect is another matter.

Most of the operating budget comes from the province. Federal resources cover the shortfalls that aren't reflected in the funding and staffing formula, which takes into account the specific characteristics of an official language minority school board.

Mr. Marc Dalton: Would you please tell us a little about the significance of francophone immigration and its impact on Prince Edward Island for the francophone community?

Mr. Brad Samson: Prince Edward Island experiences the same events as other regions of Canada but with a slight delay. Immigration definitely plays a significant role, particularly in our urban centres, but that obviously depends on your definition of the word “urban”. For us, there are two. Immigration plays a significant role and requires more resources.

You should know that we have already observed a delay among the students who enter our schools: Some rights holders aren't necessarily proficient in French. The same is true of some immigrants. Even though they are in the francophone system, they also need support in learning English so they can earn the credits they need to graduate in our system.

Unfortunately, that's not one of the province's concerns.

Mr. Marc Dalton: Thank you very much.

We see that the percentage of students attending francophone schools in New Brunswick is increasing. Congratulations.

What explains that increase?

The Chair: You have 20 seconds left.

Ms. Chantal Ouellette: Most of that increase is due to immigration.

Mr. Marc Dalton: You mentioned schools—

The Chair: Thank you. Your time is up. I'm sure you'll have an opportunity to come back to that.

The next member to speak is a native of Isle Madame.

Mr. Samson, you have the floor for six minutes.

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

Thanks as well to our guests. This study is extremely important, and their presence here may help us sort out the situation, but it will also help make the people around this table more aware of the challenges.

With respect to the money from Canadian Heritage, I've had some experience as a director general. At one point, the deputy minister told us we had to review the funding that had been granted to us because we were receiving money from Canadian Heritage. However, provincial funding for education is provided in the same way for English and French institutions. The reason why Canadian Heritage provides money is that there are additional challenges that need to be addressed, but the province doesn't address them. That's why they come to the table.

I won't go too far here, and I don't know how aware you are of this, but I want to tell you that the amendments made to Bill C-13 will, for the first time, include the preschool and post-secondary levels. So that opens the door to funding. Please bear that in mind because it's very important.

Furthermore, I don't know if you know this, but since the amendments were made by Bill C-13, it has been possible to secure land

on which to build schools. The provinces often tell the school boards that there's no land, but there is land for anglophones and not for francophones. However, the Official Languages Act now enables francophone school boards to acquire land.

Mrs. Ouellette, were you aware of those changes, which have modernized the Official Languages Act?

• (1125)

Ms. Chantal Ouellette: No, I wasn't aware that there was federal funding for land purchases. That's very good news for us.

Mr. Darrell Samson: You'll have to work hard.

Ms. Chantal Ouellette: Yes, we're going to need your support, Mr. Samson.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I'm going to continue. I believe that a number of school districts have brought a case before the courts. Is that correct?

Ms. Chantal Ouellette: That's correct. The District scolaire francophone Sud has filed suit regarding school infrastructure.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you very much. That's important.

My next question is for both school boards.

Have you been consulted?

For example, Canadian Heritage consults each province and territory to discuss French-language education in general. Have the provinces invited you to the table so you can outline your priorities as a school board?

Mr. Brad Samson: During the consultation that was conducted on the new official languages in education program agreement with Prince Edward Island, the province indicated that it had considered our strategic plan, but we weren't consulted directly.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I see. You weren't consulted.

Was New Brunswick not consulted either?

Ms. Chantal Ouellette: The school boards were consulted by the Department of Education.

Mr. Darrell Samson: That's good.

Are you aware that there's an agreement among Canadian Heritage, the Fédération des conseils scolaires francophones, the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada and the Commission nationale des parents francophones that concerns early childhood issues? According to the signed agreement, during the funding negotiations between Canadian Heritage and the provinces, the school boards' priorities will be expressed and considered.

Are you aware of that?

Mr. Brad Samson: I'm aware of the agreement as a whole. As for negotiations, some discussions are under way, but, as I mentioned earlier, funding is so closely linked to current resources that we can't undertake certain initiatives unless we remove more than 1,375 teachers from classrooms.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you. I'd just like to know if the consultations are under way.

I'm speaking to both school boards.

Is funding based on the current number of students or on the number of students in the previous year?

Mr. Ghislain Bernard: Right now, our funding is based on the number of students as of September 30 of the previous year.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Oh, that must hurt, mustn't it?

How many more students are there in your school board this year?

Mr. Ghislain Bernard: Our school board has expanded over the past seven years. We have 400 more students.

Mr. Darrell Samson: That's 400 more students in the past seven years, but how many more are there this year? Are there 50 or 60 more?

Mr. Ghislain Bernard: Yes, it's usually about that number.

Mr. Darrell Samson: That represents 10% of funding for the 50 or 60 more students; that means that you're already automatically underfunded. You have a \$600,000 shortfall. That amounts to approximately \$10,000 per student. If there are 60 more students, your school board should therefore receive an additional \$600,000. However, that amount wasn't paid because funding is based on the number of students from the previous year. The anglophone school boards are the winners here because their funding is based on the previous year, even if their population declines.

In Nova Scotia, we've managed to make a change by increasing funding by \$3 million.

Now I'll go to the representatives of the Fédération des conseils d'éducation du Nouveau-Brunswick.

Is your funding based on the number of students from the previous year or from the current year?

Ms. Chantal Ouellette: The budget is based on the number of students from the previous year. So the numbers from 2023–2024 are currently being used.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Wow, that must hurt too.

Ms. Chantal Ouellette: Yes, absolutely.

Some adjustments have been made, however.

Mr. Darrell Samson: That must really hurt because you just explained to my colleagues opposite that the number of students increased. The students in the previous year who are in the classroom aren't being funded, and you have to find money elsewhere to accommodate those poor students, who are entitled to a French-language education under section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Mr. Chair, do I have any more time to ask questions? Have I used up my speaking time?

• (1130)

The Chair: Mr. Samson, your intervention and questions are really excellent, but your time is up.

We will now go to our third speaker, Mr. Beaulieu, of the Bloc Québécois. He is the second vice-chair of the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

You have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to our guests for being here.

My first question is for all the witnesses.

Does the provincial government currently grant funding for kindergarten and preschool programs? I'm referring to francophone child care services.

Mr. Ghislain Bernard: Preschool instruction isn't part of the public school system in Prince Edward Island, but I believe those institutions are funded by both the provincial and federal governments. They offer a preschool program that costs \$10 a day.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Is that funding adequate?

Mr. Ghislain Bernard: There's often a shortage of spaces for francophones. Francophone day care centres are always full.

The restorative aspect of section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms is very much present in Prince Edward Island because we didn't have any French schools for 30 years. Our francophone day care centres therefore need francization resources. There's also a lack of space.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Is there any data on that in New Brunswick?

Ms. Chantal Ouellette: Early childhood services are twinned in New Brunswick and have been the responsibility of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development since 2011. Funding is provided in the preschool instruction budgets.

As our colleague from Prince Edward Island mentioned, the 2021–2026 Canada-New Brunswick Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Action Plan also funds some of the early childhood services.

In our province, approximately half of our children should be able to receive preschool instruction in French, but they don't have any designated \$10 spaces in the day care centres.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Earlier you said there were 11,000 rights holders. I thought that 49% of children didn't have access to French schools by and for francophones. Is that correct?

Ms. Chantal Ouellette: That number concerns early childhood, not school from kindergarten to grade 12.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: If you look at the school system, are the figures the same?

Ms. Chantal Ouellette: Just a moment; I have to check those numbers.

Mr. Levesque, can you lay your hands on those numbers faster than I can?

With regard to the school system, 49,010 children are eligible to attend French-language schools in New Brunswick. In September... At the time of Census 2021, we had 29,262 students. So 19,748 students don't attend school in the francophone educational system as they would be entitled to do.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Why do you think they don't? Is it because the schools are too far away?

Ms. Chantal Ouellette: Yes, these school proximity and transportation numbers, which Statistics Canada has provided us, clearly show that there is zero proximity in rural areas, particularly in regions where English dominates and parents ultimately choose to send their children to English-language schools.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Do you think that parents prefer to send their children to an anglophone school because it's very hard to find work in French?

Ms. Chantal Ouellette: We know that immigrants from francophone countries, such as France and Belgium, choose to put their children in the anglophone education system because they believe their children won't become bilingual if they put them in the francophone system, whereas bilingualism is the reason why they've come to New Brunswick, the only bilingual province.

And yet you can catch English like you can catch a cold in New Brunswick. There isn't necessarily any fear in that regard, but they don't know that and they make that choice.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: That's true, especially if they're in a region where not much French is spoken, in a region where English dominates, as you said.

• (1135)

Ms. Chantal Ouellette: That's correct.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: You also said that the official languages in education support programs were inadequate.

The province's programs also appear to be inadequate. Do you think you can ultimately combat assimilation? That's a tough question.

Ms. Chantal Ouellette: Unfortunately, no.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: That's a realistic answer. That's good.

Ms. Chantal Ouellette: Exactly. With the resources we have and the budgetary restrictions we face, we're hopeful, but—

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Are the community school centres in Prince Edward Island funded by the provincial governments as well, or are they funded by the federal government?

Mr. Brad Samson: Construction costs are shared, but operating costs fall to the province.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I believe my time is up.

The Chair: You had five seconds left. Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

Thanks to the witnesses.

The last person to ask questions in this six-minute round is from the New Democratic Party, and that's Ms. Ashton, a long-standing francophile, who now has the floor.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): I've been one since I was five years old; that's long-standing indeed.

Thanks to the witnesses for being here today.

My first questions concern early childhood and are for Mrs. Ouellette.

Mrs. Ouellette, thank you for describing the situation in your province for us. You discussed the infrastructure challenge—all of you have done so—and you said there weren't enough day care spaces. We clearly understand that this is a challenge that the federal government needs to address.

I also want to raise the labour shortage issue. I've previously said on numerous occasions that I myself have been on a waiting list for spaces for my two children, my twins, at a francophone day care centre near our home in Manitoba. I've never managed to get them into that day care centre because, even though they had space—and I say space, not spaces—there weren't enough people to work in the centre in French.

I think we have to acknowledge that there's a labour shortage. Mrs. Ouellette, is there an early childhood labour shortage in New Brunswick's francophone day care centres?

Ms. Chantal Ouellette: Yes, that's our situation in New Brunswick. It's the situation in both the anglophone and francophone sectors, but it's definitely more acute in the francophone sector.

I know that certain school districts have chosen to recruit directly overseas in an effort to find staff who can come and work in our early childhood centres. Then those people have to be trained so they can be certified and get a pay increase.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Do you think the federal government has a key role to play in finding solutions to address this labour shortage in the French-language early childhood sector?

Ms. Chantal Ouellette: Yes, absolutely. The federal government has a role to play in funding and, as I mentioned, in skilled immigration, by which I mean taking in people who already have early childhood or education credentials.

That would help in the early childhood sector and would be much appreciated.

Ms. Niki Ashton: All right. Thank you very much.

I'll put the same questions to you, Mr. Bernard and Mr. Samson.

What is the situation regarding the labour shortage in early childhood services in Prince Edward Island?

Mr. Ghislain Bernard: We definitely have a labour shortage. Somewhat as in New Brunswick, it extends to both anglophone and francophone day care centres, but it's more pronounced among the francophone ones. We often turn to immigration as well in an attempt to meet our needs.

We also have a labour shortage in the school sector. For the moment, we have no certified substitute teachers awaiting contracts. Our certified substitutes are retired teachers. Our other substitutes aren't certified.

The Chair: Just a minute, Mr. Bernard.

I'll stop the clock. The interpretation is apparently not working.

Ms. Ashton, you have 2 minutes and 20 seconds left.

I'm being told that it's working again. Mr. Bernard, you may continue.

• (1140)

Mr. Ghislain Bernard: Our challenges are quite similar to New Brunswick's, which Mrs. Ouellette just discussed.

Ms. Niki Ashton: That also reflects what's happening in Manitoba. At the school where my children attend grade two, a qualified retired teacher unfortunately can't leave the school because there's no one to replace her. We're grateful for her efforts, but things shouldn't be that way.

I also want to ask you a question about the federal government's role.

We know that the provincial government plays a leading role in education. As French is in decline and early childhood and education from kindergarten to grade 12 should be the starting point for learning French, don't you think the federal government should take on more responsibility? Should it play a more prominent role in coming up with solutions to address this labour shortage in early childhood and French-language education?

Mr. Ghislain Bernard: These are complicated problems, and it's not easy to find solutions to them. However, we will definitely accept any possible assistance in finding certified immigrants who can and help us.

As for certification, that should be a more provincial jurisdiction. However, I believe we need to do everything to ensure our programs succeed and that everything can help.

Mr. Brad Samson: Allow me to add a few words. It's clear that the development and vitality of the francophone minority community definitely depends on the capacity of our day care centres to take in children, first of all, since they're also the springboard to our schools. That's part of the education continuum.

Anything that can aid in recruiting and training early childhood educators and in establishing infrastructure will definitely promote the vitality and sustainability of our francophone community in Prince Edward Island.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Samson. That's all the time we had.

Mr. Levesque, I believe you wanted to add something, so I'll allow you 15 seconds in which to do so.

Mr. Robert Levesque (Member, Fédération des conseils d'éducation du Nouveau-Brunswick): Fifteen seconds: That's quite a challenge.

I simply wanted to make a connection with the labour shortage in education. The Fédération des conseils d'éducation du Nouveau-Brunswick has conducted a study on the subject. We are truly witnessing a decline in the number of graduates from the Université de Moncton, the only francophone university in New Brunswick. Briefly, I would say that there were 170 graduates, including graduates in primary, secondary and physical education. Then in subsequent years, there were respectively 178, 150 and 172.

However, here are the numbers of education graduates since 2018: There were 33 in 2018, 30 in 2019, 46 in 2020, 54 in 2021

and 57 in 2022. So we're witnessing a brutal decline in the number of graduates and in students' interest in education. We have to act. This is somewhat troubling. I just wanted to emphasize that this shortage is related to declining interest in education.

The Chair: Thank you.

I would add that, in the first week after we resumed parliamentary business, I read that 25% of teachers with fewer than 5 years' experience—so, young teachers—were leaving the profession. We need to bear in mind the fact that, as we speak, 25% of teachers with less than 5 years' experience are leaving the profession.

We have completed the first, six-minute round of questions. We will now go to a shorter round.

Ms. Gladu, a proud bilingual from Cornwall, has the floor.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): I'm from Sarnia—Lambton.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome to all the witnesses.

It's very interesting to hear about the various situations. My mother was born in Prince Edward Island and my father in New Brunswick.

Mr. Bernard, you talked about the need to change the funding formula. What change would you like to see made?

• (1145)

Mr. Ghislain Bernard: I'm going to ask Mr. Samson to answer that question.

Mr. Brad Samson: The present funding formula was established at a time when there was a large French school in Prince Edward Island. The formula met the needs of the moment. Following the Arsenaault-Cameron affair in 2000, four francophone schools were added. The problem is how to interpret the formula. You have to understand that we have small schools ranging from kindergarten to grade 12. Sometimes the formula itself is the problem; some factors are calculated and others not. At other times, the way the formula is interpreted causes enormous resource-related harm.

Consider a small school, for example. One factor in the funding formula deals with that. A school with 200 students or less will receive an additional teacher. That may be a junior high school offering grades 7, 8 and 9 on the anglophone side, or a school offering kindergarten to grade 12. With the variety of programs that we must offer from kindergarten to grade 12, it's impossible to believe that only one additional teacher can cover the shortfall. Our classes are obviously very small.

That example illustrates several factors that the formula doesn't take into account.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Just—

The Chair: I'm going to interrupt you, Ms. Gladu, and I'm stopping the clock.

I'm going back over what has been said. I did this on Tuesday as well. We aren't in your shoes. You are experts. You are discussing funding. There's provincial funding, the funding formula and OLEP. I would ask you to clarify what this is about, please, and then we will take notes and write a report.

Ms. Gladu, you may continue.

I will restart the clock.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Mrs. Ouellette, considering the rising cost of living, you said you were already short of funding. How much money do you need?

Ms. Chantal Ouellette: I don't have the figures with me, but I can give you an answer later, if you wish.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Yes, that's a good idea. You could also include the changes you would like to make to the funding formula. You can send your answer to the clerk.

Mr. Bernard, what should the federal government do to help you?

Mr. Ghislain Bernard: First, we would like to be a stakeholder in the negotiations regarding the official languages in education program, or OLEP, agreements. The agreements are reached with the provincial government, but we aren't involved. I'd like a seat at the table so we can take part in the negotiations and discuss our priorities.

Second, we should establish what we need in order to have francophone schools that are on an equitable level with the majority schools. I use the word "equitable"; that could mean something as simple as the travel time to school. The usual travel time to a local school in the anglophone school boards is approximately an hour; it's about an hour and 20 minutes for the francophone schools. So there's already a disadvantage in going to a francophone school in Prince Edward Island, which we don't think should be the case.

We think that OLEP funding could help us put the francophone education system on an equitable footing with the majority language system.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: I see. Thank you.

I'm going to ask you the same question, Mrs. Ouellette.

Ms. Chantal Ouellette: The answer for New Brunswick is the same as our colleague's answer for Prince Edward Island.

I have nothing more to say, except that Mr. Levesque may have something to add.

Mr. Robert Levesque: I actually like what Mr. Bernard said: that we need to be stakeholders and at the bargaining table. It's true that the education councils are consulted, but they don't necessarily have a right or decision-making power.

I'd like to remind you that the education councils, the ECs, are elected by universal suffrage, as are provincial and federal members. These are people who represent the voice of rights-holder parents.

In my opinion, the fact that they sit on an education council but don't necessarily have authority to make budget-related decisions is definitely a problem. I think it would be a good start for the school boards to be stakeholders and sit at the bargaining table. They're elected by universal suffrage to represent rights holders.

• (1150)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Levesque and Ms. Gladu.

The next speaker represents a riding in the Quebec City area.

Mr. Lightbound, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Louis-Hébert, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to go back to the questions my colleague Mr. Samson asked, although I'll definitely be doing so in a less eloquent and colourful manner.

Something piqued my curiosity, and I'm going to draw a somewhat simple analogy. My son was born last year. If I used the data from last year to establish my budget, it wouldn't be balanced because there are more demands and needs this year.

If I understand what my colleague explained and what you've confirmed, the budgets that the province grants you are based on the previous year's numbers and therefore on the number of enrolments from the previous year. That's an advantage for school boards that have a declining clientele and a disadvantage for those with a growing clientele, which is your case.

Is that a correct understanding?

Would you please tell us more about that situation?

Has that always been the case?

What impact does that have on your funding and activities?

My question is for Mrs. Ouellette, but then Mr. Levesque may answer it too.

Ms. Chantal Ouellette: I'm going to ask Mr. Levesque to answer the question first.

Mr. Robert Levesque: First and foremost, I must say that I like what Mr. Samson said, that the government always relies on a previous list which isn't adequate given the numbers. Consequently, there's a shortfall every year.

I'd like to digress for a moment. We were discussing the rising cost of living earlier. Every dollar that we received from OLEP 10 or 12 years ago is only worth \$0.56 today. That's the result of inflation and the 20% increase in the number of students at francophone schools. Consequently, the purchasing power of a dollar is now equal to \$0.56.

According to the new agreement for 2023–2028, there have been increases, which we're glad to see, but there's still a significant shortfall because a dollar is only worth \$0.67, even allowing for inflation and the rising numbers of students in the francophone schools. Inflation affects all of us.

Mr. Joël Lightbound: If my understanding is correct, according to the figures we're relying on, we should consider the initial purchasing power of the dollars previously invested in the program. However, are student registration numbers an issue that's on the New Brunswick government's radar?

Is it being discussed?

Do you view it as unfair?

Mr. Robert Levesque: I'm going to ask Mrs. Ouellette to answer your questions.

Ms. Chantal Ouellette: There's been an increase in the number of francophone students in New Brunswick since 2021. The number of francophone students had previously fallen. So this is a new situation that we're still adjusting to.

As regards budgets, the government offers adjustments during the year, when school districts have tightened their belts as far as they can and have to beg the department for money to avoid an end-of-year deficit.

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Thank you very much.

I'm going to change the subject, but I'm still speaking to you, Mrs. Ouellette.

You said that approximately 5,900 or 5,450 students didn't have access to French-language day care services. In other words, we're talking about 49% of rights holders.

Do you have any statistics on those children? For example, how many of them wind up in a francophone primary school? How many of them ultimately continue their education in English if they attended an anglophone early childhood facility?

Ms. Chantal Ouellette: We don't have any specific data on that yet, but the figure you're looking for is 5,453 children. That's the number of children who were eligible for instruction in French in 2021. Once children begin their education in English, we know they will continue in English, hence the difference of approximately 11,000 students that we don't have in the francophone system.

• (1155)

Mr. Joël Lightbound: I have a brief final question because I don't have a lot of time left.

Mr. Levesque, would you say that the declining graduation rate of teachers that you've observed presents an existential threat to your system?

Mr. Robert Levesque: Yes.

We talk a lot about the fact that we need to invest in infrastructure, and that's absolutely true.

However, what has the greatest impact on student learning? It's skilled academic personnel. It's not concrete walls; it's really the personnel. Competent and qualified staff are the soul of a school,

and my observation is that the situation is very troubling in that respect.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Levesque and Mr. Lightbound.

Mr. Beaulieu, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I don't remember whether it was Mr. Bernard or Mr. Samson who mentioned the right of remedy and the fact that there were no schools at all for some 30 years.

Would you please tell us more about that?

To what extent have successive provincial governments acknowledged the right of remedy?

Mr. Ghislain Bernard: To understand the right of remedy, you have to consider the chain of events.

The provincial government shut down francophone schools in 1970. There were approximately 60 French-language schools in Prince Edward Island. All but one were closed. There was a community—

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: That was in 1970.

Mr. Ghislain Bernard: Yes, that was in 1970.

In 2000, the *Arsenault-Cameron v. Prince Edward Island* ruling restored the right to French schools to Prince Edward Island francophones. In our view, a rights holder can be a rights holder by inheritance. He doesn't speak French because he was unable to attend a French school.

Our communities, formerly francophone, began to speak English to support their children who went to English schools. For a whole generation, there was much less French.

Our mission is somewhat to refrancize those regions. We have francization officers in our schools. We don't have enough of them, but we do have them. Our teachers have two roles: first, they must teach the curriculum and second, they must francize young people. We would like to start that process at the preschool level as well.

Right now, we don't have a francization officer at the preschool level, but we see that as a need.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: There was no funding for French schools from 1970 to 2000; is that correct?

Mr. Ghislain Bernard: From 1970 to 2000, only one French-language school in Prince Edward Island was funded: École Évangéline.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Only one school. All the others....

Before that, how many francophone schools were there?

Mr. Ghislain Bernard: There were 60.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Okay. So there was a real desire to assimilate francophones.

Mr. Ghislain Bernard: It's an exercise called "consolidation."

We went to schools that were often very small, some with only one room, as in the past. Larger schools were consolidated with gymnasiums and cafeterias. During that process, we did not want there to be two schools in the communities, that is, a French school and an English school. That was the saddest thing done to francophones in Prince Edward Island.

In 2000—

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: In a more distant past, laws prohibited French schools and the teaching of French.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu and Mr. Bernard.

Ms. Ashton, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

I've been generous in giving everybody a little more time. You've all had 10 to 15 seconds more.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

With regard to the labour shortage, let's talk a little about training needs for early childhood educators and for post-secondary education.

Mr. Levesque, you presented some really shocking and disturbing statistics about the number of graduates coming out of our institutions. We know, for example, that the burnout rate among teachers is very high. The chair of the committee mentioned that as well. We see that there's a lack of support in the classrooms and schools.

I know that those who teach in French in minority communities are under additional pressure, not only to educate our young people, but also to create a universe, a francophone community based on what they do in the classroom and in their school. They are being asked to do a lot more.

I want to raise the issue of post-secondary support for education. Many francophone universities and colleges have made it clear that the promised funding of \$80 million per year hasn't materialized under the governing Liberals, and that this is a problem.

Do you support francophone colleges and universities when they say that stable, long-term funding of \$80 million per year would be essential to address the education and preschool labour shortage?

The witnesses from New Brunswick might begin.

Mr. Levesque, do you have any comments on that?

• (1200)

Mr. Robert Levesque: Thank you, Ms. Ashton.

In fact, if there is a shortage, it's because there is a recruitment problem. It's no secret that there are fewer registrations and fewer enrolments and fewer admissions to education programs. There is a lack of interest.

What is the reason? We consulted 424 francophone students across the province, and research shows that 41% of students said they did not have the patience needed to become a teacher and manage behavioural problems. That is the first reason.

The second reason they cite for their lack of interest in education is that it takes too much time. It is well known that corrections and planning are done during the weekend, at night, and that overtime

isn't paid. Those perceptions must be overcome to encourage students to choose the field of education.

You mentioned the \$80 million. Of course, that would be welcome because generally when we see a shortage in one area, we implement initiatives to attract people. Sometimes, it's a matter of reducing the cost of university registration or admission.

It is very symbolic. We are simply saying that there is a shortage and that we will pay a percentage of the tuition fees of those who choose education. This would encourage students. I am relating this to the financial aspect of the \$80 million. It is simply a matter of alleviating students' tax problems or debts to encourage them to study in this field.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Levesque.

Thank you, Ms. Ashton.

Before we finish this first part, and before we get to the second panel, who are from the Northwest Territories, I want to let the witnesses know that they can stay. It's a public meeting, so they can stay if they wish. They are welcome.

I think Ms. Gladu asked for some information, but if there is any additional information that you think would be helpful to the committee, please send it to us. Remember, we're not in your experts' shoes. If you are talking about funding, please specify which funding. For example, specify whether it is the OLEP or provincial funding, so that we are clear on what it is. Feel free to do so.

Before we briefly suspend the meeting to welcome the next panel, I want to send a message. This is a public meeting and Canadians are listening. I imagine that many school boards listen to us in minority communities. In Quebec, it's the anglophone communities, and outside Quebec, it's the francophone communities. All members of the Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones.

[*English*]

as well as all the members of the Quebec English School Boards Association will receive a questionnaire very soon.

[*Translation*]

The school boards, school districts, whatever their name, all the members of the two national organizations I just mentioned, namely the Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones and the Quebec English School Board Association, will receive a questionnaire directly related to this study. It is important that it be filled out. I think the deadline is December 31.

I want to say to those who are listening online that we need this, because it will really help us produce an excellent report. With that, I will briefly suspend the meeting.

• (1200) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1210)

The Chair: We'll reconvene the meeting.

Welcome to the committee. For this second part of meeting number 114 of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, we welcome, also as part of the study on the minority language education continuum, the President of the Commission scolaire francophone des Territoires du Nord-Ouest, Mr. Jean de Dieu Tuyishime.

As we normally do, we will give you five minutes to make your presentation. After that, you will be asked interactive rounds of questions. Each of the political parties will participate.

Mr. Tuyishime, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Jean de Dieu Tuyishime (Chairman, Commission scolaire francophone des Territoires du Nord-Ouest): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Committee members, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am here to present the crucial issues related to French-language education in francophone minority communities in Canada, more specifically in the Northwest Territories. My presentation will be divided into three parts: kindergarten to grade 12, early childhood, and finally, post-secondary, if I have enough time.

Access to French-language schools in minority communities is essential to preserving the French language and culture. In the Northwest Territories, two French-language schools serve the community: École Allain St-Cyr in Yellowknife, which is currently at its full capacity of 200 students, and École Boréale in Hay River, whose student numbers are steadily declining. This imbalance is mainly due to a lack of adequate infrastructure, which directly affects the ability of schools to attract and retain students.

Funding, particularly from the Official Languages in Education Program, the OLEP, continues to pose a serious challenge. Although the last Action Plan for Official Languages announced an increase in funding, we see a decrease in the amount allocated per student. This situation is worrisome as the needs in francophone minority schools continue to grow. To meet those growing challenges, it is imperative that per student funding from the OLEP be not only restored to its previous levels, but also increased to better support francophone communities.

Moreover, reliable data on the number of rights holders is essential if we are to request infrastructure equivalent to that of English-language schools and meet the growing needs of the community. Statistics Canada's census regarding rights holders plays a key role in that process. Recent census data have already led to negotiations for the creation of new educational infrastructure.

However, it will be crucial for Statistics Canada to continue estimating the number of rights holders in future censuses. This process makes it possible to track demographic trends and adapt services to the changing needs of francophone minority communities. The lack of adequate infrastructure and funding undermines the

ability of French-language schools to offer an education equivalent to that of English-language schools. That is why it is necessary to strengthen infrastructure investments and guarantee equitable funding to ensure the real equality and vitality of francophone education in Canada.

Access to French-language day care services is fundamental to establishing a solid educational continuum and fighting assimilation. Unfortunately, there is a lack of French-language day care centres in many regions, including the Northwest Territories. For example, a 38-space day care in Yellowknife serves the francophone population, but there is still a list of 50 children waiting for a space. There are no French-language day care facilities in places like Hay River, Fort Smith or Inuvik. This situation seriously compromises the continuity of French-language education.

In the absence of French-language day care, many children are forced to use English-language services, reducing the likelihood that they will continue their education in French. It is therefore crucial to increase funding for the creation of new francophone day care centres in those underserved regions. At the same time, there is a need to promote the training of early childhood educators to meet the growing demand.

With regard to post-secondary education, the lack of post-secondary French-language institutions and programs in western Canada poses a major problem for student retention in the francophone education system. Knowing that their post-secondary education will probably be in English, many students drop out of French-language education before they even finish high school. This phenomenon undermines the continuity of francophone education and student loyalty to francophone schools. It is essential to recognize that the lack of post-secondary options in French has a direct impact on the vitality of francophone communities because it limits their economic and cultural development.

Finally, from early childhood to adulthood, every francophone child must have the opportunity to receive quality education in his or her mother tongue. This is a necessary condition for ensuring the sustainability and vitality of our communities.

Thank you.

• (1215)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Tuyishime. You finished on time.

During the first round of questions and answers, each political party will have six minutes.

We'll start with the Conservative Party.

Mr. Généreux, you have the floor.

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. By the way, Mr. Lightbound chairs the Standing Committee on Industry and Technology, and I have to congratulate you, because food here is better. However, Mr. Lightbound is more generous with the time he gives us to ask questions, and he doesn't cut us off. I think that should be taken into consideration.

Thank you to the witnesses.

Good afternoon, Mr. Tuyishime. I hope you're doing well. You just said, in concluding your testimony, that the education continuum must be of the best quality, from early childhood to university. Given your conclusion, do you feel that this is not the case in your region right now? If so, is it because education doesn't get enough funding? You will certainly answer in the affirmative. If that's the case, is it more specifically due to inflation? The other witnesses we heard—you may have heard them as well—told us that inflation had played a significant role in reducing the amounts spent on francophone education.

Mr. Jean de Dieu Tuyishime: Thank you.

Our goal is always to offer our students quality education in our schools in their mother tongue. We are very proud to say that we still have quality teachers. However, it must be said that the competition is quite harsh. We also know that there is a labour shortage across Canada, and it's an even greater challenge for us, since we live in the north. Not everyone wants to venture into areas where it is -30°C or -40°C to offer their services. This represents an additional challenge. Moreover, the other big challenge with that is the lack of day care spaces for families. Perhaps we will discuss it.

In short, as far as the quality of services is concerned, although recruiting teachers is a major challenge, we've been fortunate to have enough teachers so far. However, there is a funding challenge because the amount allocated per student is insufficient.

• (1220)

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Okay.

I thought I saw that your region had one of the largest influxes of francophones in Canada. Did I dream that?

Mr. Jean de Dieu Tuyishime: You probably confused it with the Yukon because in the Northwest Territories we're seeing a decline in the general population. However, we're still seeing an increase in the number of people who can speak French. In that regard, we are indeed seeing an increase.

Francophones now represent 10% of the population of the Northwest Territories. In fact, the census showed that there is a large proportion of rights holders, but that 20% of them attend our schools.

So we're really falling short of what we can offer them.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Okay.

In your testimony, you briefly talked about infrastructure. I would like to come back to what Mr. Samson said earlier about Bill C-13, which was passed.

There is indeed a provision in the bill, or in the act, that allows school boards to apply for access to land. I would simply like to underline that the act does not say that the federal government will

necessarily invest in those lands. I know my colleague Mr. Samson well, and he is very enthusiastic. It is true that the new legislation opens doors everywhere, but that doesn't necessarily mean that the federal government, in addition to giving access to the land, will fund it. I just wanted to highlight that.

Is my time up, Mr. Chair? I guess so.

The Chair: You have 20 seconds left, Mr. Généreux.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: You are very kind, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Tuyishime. I hope to return to your region one day. I have only been there once in my life, during a trip by the Standing Committee on Official Languages; we were very well received there.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Généreux.

I gave you an extra 15 seconds because you said that this committee's chair was more praiseworthy than the chair of another committee.

The next questioner is Ms. Koutrakis, for six minutes.

Ms. Annie Koutrakis (Vimy, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Tuyishime, thank you for your testimony.

I would like to give you the opportunity to speak about the agreements and challenges in your region.

What are your main concerns about French-language education at the primary and secondary levels? You mentioned an increase in the French-speaking population, but what are your main concerns?

Mr. Jean de Dieu Tuyishime: Thank you for your question.

Our first concern is infrastructure. We really need infrastructure that meets our current needs. As I said in my remarks, one of our schools is currently overcrowded. As a result, the facilities are no longer suitable for students. There is another school with a smaller capacity, but whose high school students attend classes in trailers or mobile homes. It's very concerning to see high school students in that kind of infrastructure.

Our second concern pertains to land. We currently don't have enough land to enlarge the schools, which is a concern when the maximum capacity has been reached.

Our third concern is labour. You didn't ask me about early childhood education, which is really the starting point. Since there are no French-language day care centres, we are losing many children who should be attending our schools, be it elementary or secondary. We're already losing many children, because they're attending majority language schools, which doesn't help us.

Our fourth concern is related to funding. As I mentioned, current funding per student is less than it was in 2006, for example.

In summary, my concerns are infrastructure, space or land, labour, and most importantly, funding.

• (1225)

Ms. Annie Koutrakis: Does the funding come from the territorial government or the federal government?

Mr. Jean de Dieu Tuyishime: Some of the funding comes from the territorial government, and some from the federal government through the OLEP, the Official Languages in Education Program. When I talk about chronic underfunding, I'm talking about the OLEP money that is given to fund elementary and secondary education.

At home, the OLEP funds elementary and secondary education. That's where the underfunding is.

Ms. Annie Koutrakis: Were you consulted on the next protocol and the bilateral agreements?

Mr. Jean de Dieu Tuyishime: We weren't consulted.

I must also say that we would like the federal government to respect its obligations when it enters into this kind of intergovernmental agreement. We would really like to see appropriate language provisions that protect minority rights.

We'd also like to see the federal government commit to service delivery agreements with the provincial and territorial governments for greater accountability and transparency, so that we know where that money is going, because we don't know how those agreements are made.

Ms. Annie Koutrakis: Are there any opinions or recommendations that come directly from parents about preschool, pre-kindergarten or early childhood?

Mr. Jean de Dieu Tuyishime: There are many concerns among parents, of course. As I told you, we have only one French-language day care centre in the Northwest Territories. It accommodates 38 children.

Recently, the territorial government sent a proposal to all school boards to open day care centres. Only the francophone school board raised its hand, precisely to open a francophone day care.

• (1230)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Tuyishime. We're a little over our time. You can continue to make your points in the next round.

We will continue with the Bloc Québécois.

Mr. Beaulieu, you have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Thank you.

Mr. Tuyishime, I'll let you continue.

Earlier, I thought I heard you say that there was no French-language day care. Now, you say that there is a French-language day care with 38 children. Could you tell us a little bit more about that?

Mr. Jean de Dieu Tuyishime: Yes.

There is only one French-language day care centre in the Northwest Territories. It's located in Yellowknife and serves 38 children. However, there is still a waiting list, which means that many rights holders don't have access to those services. So we lose many of the rights holders' children, who go to other day care centres and end up in the majority's schools.

As I was saying, we raised our hand and the territorial government now has a process for setting up a French-language day care. But there are many challenges, because, as I said, there is no space at the school. It has to be set up outside the school, which is very difficult.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Is there a great need, outside of Yellowknife, for francophone day care centres or kindergartens?

Mr. Jean de Dieu Tuyishime: Yes, absolutely.

In fact, as I said, in a community called Hay River, the absence of day care centres explains why the French-language school in that small community is losing more and more students.

In another community, Fort Smith, the parents raised their hands. They want to see a day care centre set up, and the statistics show that there are enough rights holders to provide that type of early childhood service.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: You also said that the Official Languages in Education Program announced an increase in funding, but that you had noted a decrease in the amount allocated per student.

Can you explain why?

We have a chart here that seems to show an increase. Does this decrease really come from the federal government, or is it the share that the Government of the Northwest Territories gives you?

Mr. Jean de Dieu Tuyishime: I think a previous witness, Mr. Levesque, talked about that.

Yes, we had that increase, but because of inflation and all kinds of crises, we already had a deficit. According to the study conducted, for every dollar we got, we received the equivalent of 56 cents. Now, a 12% indexation has increased the funding, so we get the equivalent of 67 cents on the dollar. So there's still a gap in that area.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: So there was an increase in funding, but it wasn't enough to offset cost increases, and so on.

Mr. Jean de Dieu Tuyishime: Absolutely.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Okay.

Here at the committee, we talk a lot about francophone immigration.

Does francophone immigration in the Northwest Territories increase the proportion of francophone students in schools?

Mr. Jean de Dieu Tuyishime: Yes, we have very significant francophone immigration, which is increasing this student population. That explains why we have already exceeded the capacity of one of our schools, which is in the capital, in Yellowknife. Most of that is due to immigration. Francophone immigration contributes to the vitality of the francophone community. The Mobilité francophone program brings many francophone workers to the Northwest Territories.

• (1235)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I assume that the shortage of teachers is having a major impact on you.

Mr. Jean de Dieu Tuyishime: Absolutely. This shortage affects us a lot, especially since we are still competing with French immersion schools. They are also looking for French-speaking teachers.

We are always looking for innovative ways to recruit teachers. Sometimes the funding is not necessarily enough to meet all the needs of those teaching professionals. Indeed, we are trying to be very creative in assisting them. For example, we invite teachers to visit the site, we help them find housing, which is very difficult, given the housing crisis. That may also be one of the reasons for the labour shortage in our region.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu and Mr. Tuyishime.

Our next questioner is from the New Democratic Party, Ms. Ashton.

The floor is yours for six minutes.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Tuyishime, thank you very much for your testimony.

You told us about a number of priorities in your region, which are the same in our regions, particularly in northern Manitoba.

Obviously, you also raised a number of the challenges that we heard from previous witnesses, as well as witnesses from French-language minority schools across the country.

However, I also want to point out the specific context of the north, which is the higher cost of living and the housing crisis, which is even more difficult in those regions. We must recognize that you need specific support that reflects this reality.

I also want to raise the issue of labour shortages in early childhood and education.

Could you tell us about the concrete impact of this shortage on your schools and on the quality of education?

Mr. Jean de Dieu Tuyishime: The effect is very real.

We have seen this shortage and have turned to international recruitment to counter it. However, it is very difficult to recruit staff. What's even more difficult is that parents run this day care. The parents' committee and the parents' board of directors are in charge. The load is increased when there's a very constant turnover of educators in this small day care. It's extremely difficult for parents. I

would add that there's an endless waiting list, which is indeed very difficult.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you for sharing that with us.

Parents obviously have a role to play, and school districts do indeed have a major role to play, but witnesses have told us that the labour shortage is a systemic challenge and that it has an impact on learning French from early childhood.

Given that reality, do you think the federal government should play a greater role in finding solutions to the labour shortage, including funding?

• (1240)

Mr. Jean de Dieu Tuyishime: I certainly think the federal government could play a major role.

I could point to one initiative. We are working with the Collège nordique francophone, a post-secondary institution, to offer courses to teachers. It's local and offered on site. However, of course, those colleges or institutions must be able to get funding for this type of program.

There is another thing. The work of teachers should also be valued. I don't know about other provinces and territories, but I know that salaries are not necessarily commensurate with the work those teachers do. So I think the funding should be targeted. As I said earlier, the amounts allocated in the agreements should be linked to language clauses. So it could be allocated based on language clauses.

Ms. Niki Ashton: You raised some very important points.

I would like to come back to the issue of funding for post-secondary education.

A number of francophone colleges and university representatives have told us that the federal government still hasn't provided the \$80 million a year in funding that it had promised. It's a promise that hasn't materialized. They told us it had a negative effect on them.

Do you support their request for stable, long-term funding of \$80 million per year? Would that funding be important in order to find solutions to the challenges you are also facing?

Mr. Jean de Dieu Tuyishime: I do think that funding for post-secondary education in francophone minority communities would, for example, provide structured funding, which could increase access to programs and training in those post-secondary institutions.

As I always say, if we don't have the proper training and the people to provide that training, we won't have the basis for teaching our students, our children. They won't be well trained from the start.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Tuyishime and Ms. Ashton.

Mr. Tuyishime, thank you for taking part in this exercise. You were alone to face six-minute rounds of questions per political party, whereas there were four previous witnesses to do so.

If you have any additional information that would be useful to the committee's study, please feel free to send it to the clerk, who will forward it to all committee members. Thank you very much.

Mr. Jean de Dieu Tuyishime: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Have a good day.

The Chair: We will now suspend the meeting and go in camera to discuss committee business.

• (1240) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1245)

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