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# Standing Committee on Official Languages

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Chair: Yvan Baker





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• (1105)

[*Translation*]

**The Chair (Yvan Baker (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.)):** Good morning, everyone.

Welcome to meeting number 10 of the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(f) and the motion adopted by the committee on September 25, 2025, the committee is meeting today to continue its study on the continuum of education in the minority language.

I would now like to welcome the witnesses we have here for the first hour of the meeting.

We have Ali Chaisson and Nicole Arseneau-Sluyter, executive director and president of the Acadian Society of New Brunswick, respectively, as well as Marie-Anne Alepin, general president of the Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Montréal.

**Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC):** Mr. Chair, before we begin the opening remarks, I have a point of order regarding procedure.

**The Chair:** You have the floor, Mr. Godin.

**Joël Godin:** I apologize to the witnesses for taking the floor.

Mr. Chair, I'm a bit surprised at the meeting timelines. I don't want to blame anyone, but I learned yesterday morning, at a meeting with an organization, that it was coming to testify on Thursday as part of the study stemming from the adopted motion on the Prime Minister's French, which had been proposed under Standing Order 106(4).

I don't think it's normal for us, as parliamentarians, to get that information from the witness himself. He was invited last week, but it was when he was in my office on Monday morning that he informed me that we were going to see each other again on Thursday.

I would like us to readjust the procedure. The witnesses today were probably informed that they were coming long before we were. For our part, we were informed late Friday afternoon of the identity of the witnesses here today, that is, Tuesday.

To do a good job, we have to be informed in advance. I understand that sometimes some of the witnesses haven't confirmed whether they'll appear. In that case, it makes perfect sense not to inform us, for logistical reasons. However, can we be informed of any confirmed attendance and receive updates as new witnesses confirm that they're coming?

That's the first point I wanted to raise. I would like to raise one more. Do you want to answer that first question, or can I speak to the second one right away?

**The Chair:** I can answer that first question.

The clerk is doing her best to invite the witnesses and confirm their attendance. Once all the witnesses invited to a meeting have confirmed that they will appear, she can send the members the notice of meeting, which includes the list of witnesses who will be present. There's obviously a delay between the time the clerk confirms a witness's appearance and the time the notice is sent out, but that generally isn't very long. However, it may have taken a little longer in this case.

**Joël Godin:** I've experienced it, and I want to share my experience. The goal isn't to target people who may not have done their job well. In other words, I don't want to attack the clerk about her work. I just want measures to be taken from now on so that we're informed as soon as possible about the confirmed witnesses and so that we can properly prepare and do excellent work for official languages.

The case I'm submitting to you is very clear: I met with this person in my office on Monday morning at 10 a.m., and it was on Monday afternoon at 1 p.m. that we received the notice of meeting for Thursday. Since this is a very sensitive file, I wondered whether anyone in management was withholding information.

I would like to ask that we be informed as soon as possible. The person who came into my office on Monday morning had received the invitation on the previous Thursday or Friday. That means we lost the opportunity to use the weekend to prepare. I understand that we don't work 24 hours a day, but if we want to be better parliamentarians and do a thorough job, we have to be informed about the witnesses who have confirmed their attendance. It isn't normal for one of the witnesses to tell me that the committee will be starting a new study on Thursday.

**The Chair:** I will speak with the clerk at the end of the meeting to see if we can do something to inform the members more quickly. That said, I think efforts are already being made to do so as quickly as possible. As I said, there's obviously a delay of a few hours, and sometimes members are informed the day after the confirmation of a witness's appearance. I'll see if there's a way to do it more quickly, Mr. Godin.

**Joël Godin:** Mr. Chair, I don't understand why you're giving me that answer. The witnesses were invited last Thursday or Friday, and I received the notice of meeting on Monday afternoon. I just happened to meet with a representative of that organization right before that. As a parliamentarian, I was in a privileged position compared with the other people around the table, since I had information that no one else had.

In short, we can do better. I ask that we be informed as soon as you have the information so that we can do our job properly. I'm asking for the sake of the work and for the sake of all the committee members.

**The Chair:** Mr. Beaulieu, the floor is yours.

**Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ):** I'll be very quick.

I think it happens quite often that the clerk invites witnesses and they decline the invitation, which complicates things quite a bit. We often call or contact her, and she tells us roughly where things stand. I understand that it's sometimes difficult to predict. For example, on Thursday, one of the witnesses I had proposed to invite initially refused, and then there was talk of possibly postponing their appearance.

You could send us information telling us that you're trying to invite witnesses. I'm aware that this would complicate your work. In any case, we'll see what can be done. I understand that it's difficult. That said, if we had decided on the studies more in advance, it would be easier.

**The Chair:** Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

**Joël Godin:** Mr. Chair, to add to that, I would say that my goal isn't to accuse anyone, but I find it unacceptable for a witness to inform me of what's going to be on the committee's agenda on Thursday. I just want us to find a solution.

Notices of meeting have been amended in the past. One option would be to send us the notice as soon as there is confirmation, even if it means making changes afterward. We understand that, for a variety of reasons, each individual's schedule can change. In this case, though, nothing changed between the time the invitation was issued on Thursday or Friday—I don't have the exact date, but I could find it—and the time the notice of meeting was sent out on Monday afternoon. The witness had confirmed their attendance. We could have received the notice on Friday, which would have given us more time to prepare.

This is an important situation to consider. I appreciate your responsiveness, Mr. Chair. I hope that we will find more effective ways to be better informed in the future.

**The Chair:** I'll confer with the clerk on that.

Mr. Godin, I know you wanted to raise a second point, but I'm aware that we have witnesses before us. As I said five or 10 minutes ago, I will be happy to work with the clerk to find a faster way to inform committee members. I hesitate to get into the details of the process right now, given that we have witnesses waiting for us.

• (1110)

**Joël Godin:** Thank you for your responsiveness. Let us help each other be more effective and better informed.

The other thing I wanted to point out is simply that I sent a notice of motion. I can't discuss the motion today, because of the 48-hour deadline, but the notice of motion will be distributed by the clerk within the next few hours, if it hasn't already been done, for us to discuss it next Thursday. Perhaps it should be added to the committee's agenda.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

Let us get back to the witnesses now.

I would like to welcome the witnesses. Each organization will have five minutes for their opening remarks. We will then move on to a question and answer period with committee members.

Ms. Arseneau-Sluyter, the floor is yours for five minutes.

**Nicole Arseneau-Sluyter (President, Acadian Society of New Brunswick):** Mr. Chair, members of the committee, ladies and gentlemen, it is a privilege to be here to talk about the continuum of education, from early childhood to the post-secondary level.

For a long time, discussions pertaining to education took place mainly between the federal government and the provinces. In 1982, new players came onto the scene: school boards. They are often the only real place where our communities can truly have our voices heard. However, no francophone school board in the country is currently able to fully educate all its rights holders.

Let's be honest: Everything starts in early childhood. That's the key. We need more spots allocated to francophone services, better access to said services and better-paid, better-trained staff. Without these things, we'll never make it.

I would like to talk to you about a situation I experienced back home in Saint-Jean. Nearly 1,000 rights holders do not have access to a spot in a French school. Because of a lack of spots and schools, these children are only integrated into the system gradually. That's the sad state of affairs. That's what I'm seeing, what I'm hearing, what I'm experiencing and what people are talking to me about. That's where we're at and it's real.

When schools can't accommodate their own rights holders, it jeopardizes our linguistic identity. The Acadian Society of New Brunswick, or SANB, is convinced that in order to preserve our identity, anything to do with early childhood must include the federal government, the province and the community. The community has to be at the table. That's the key to attaining substantive equality.

The evolution of French-language education in New Brunswick and Canada has met many challenges and struggles. In 2025, we still have to fight for the very existence of our francophone schools. Today, New Brunswick's Education Act has no constitutional basis. That is why the SANB is advocating for full school management, a model that would allow our communities, particularly elected school boards, to manage and control both the schools and the programs offered therein.

Francophone post-secondary institutions in minority communities across the country remain fragile. They are young and are still struggling to compete with the majority's large institutions. This is the result of a history in which our communities have been pushed towards assimilation. This fragility makes it even more difficult to remedy the historical injustices weighing on our thriving communities.

When Father Clément Cormier and his collaborators founded an Acadian university, no one could have imagined that a simple constitutional amendment in 1982 would change our reality so much. This university, centred on the New Brunswick community, was created to train generations of Acadians. Let's not forget that, in 1963, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms did not exist, nor did French immersion. Most francophone school boards in Canada had not even seen the light of day.

So how can we expect an Acadian institution to meet the growing demand for francophone schools across Canada? This reality puts enormous pressure on the training of teachers who will be working in our Acadian schools.

The numbers are a testament to this situation. While the major universities in the province have hundreds of millions of dollars in revenue and donations, the Université de Moncton, our Acadian university, has much less. This confirms one thing: It will continue to depend financially on the government.

That's why our first recommendation is to strengthen accountability for early childhood education, so that francophone day cares actually receive the funds earmarked for them.

Second, school boards must be allowed to negotiate directly with the federal government, since large sums are absorbed by provincial governments and do not reach those in need.

Third, ensuring predictable post-secondary funding is essential to the emancipation and future of our institutions.

I appeal to you, distinguished members of the committee: Let us work together. We ask you to act, co-operate and commit yourselves alongside us.

Thank you for your attention.

• (1115)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Arseneau-Sluyter.

I'll now yield the floor to Ms. Alepin for five minutes.

**Marie-Anne Alepin (General President, Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Montréal):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Honourable members of the committee, thank you for inviting me to take part in these consultations.

Our organization was founded in Lower Canada in 1834 to defend the French language and democracy. At the time, we were fighting with patriots against British repression. As you know, other Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste, or SSJB, chapters sprang up just about everywhere in Canada in the 19th and 20th centuries. They played a central role in all of Quebec's and French Canadians' language battles.

The SSJB has always been close to francophone communities outside Quebec and has supported their fight and taken part in their large mobilizations and protests. Specifically, I am referring to mobilizations and protests against regulation 17 in Ontario and against the closure of Franco-Saskatchewanian and Acadian schools.

Although anglophones have a numerical minority in Quebec, they are part of the majority of Canadians that elect the federal government, which has predominant power to legislate and spend public funds. They have enjoyed broad privileges since British and English Canadian colonialism.

After the conquest, British authorities were quick to recognize that asserting discipline and assimilating the Canadian population into the empire would require establishing control over the education system. From 1766, British authorities inaugurated some 30 or so English-language schools in major urban centres in Quebec, even as French-language schools experienced a marked decline. Starting in 1790, there was approximately one school for every 588 anglophone residents, compared to just one for every 4,000 francophone residents.

In 1801, in Lower Canada, the governor adopted the law creating the Royal Institution for the Advancement of Learning, the official name of today's McGill University, which established royal schools in rural communities to provide English-language instruction.

By 1828, more than 90% of children did not have access to schooling for lack of money in their parish of residence. The Patriote Party members of parliament, together with Louis-Joseph Papineau, decided to rectify the deplorable situation and passed the Loi des écoles de syndics. However, in 1836, the British governor vetoed the renewal of this law and as a result, over 70% of the 1,462 existing schools were forced to close. The Province of Lower Canada did not have any school structures for more than six years. English-speaking Lower Canadians already had five institutes of higher education, but there were none for francophone Canadians. Université Laval in Quebec City was only established in 1852.

In English-speaking Canada, the regime established by the Constitution Act, 1867, was characterized by a kind of anti-francophone paranoia fuelled by the Orange movement and the Ku Klux Klan. Language laws prohibiting the teaching of French and its use in parliamentary practice were in force across all provinces that are now majority anglophone. Members would be familiar with the laws from that era, including the Tupper Law in Nova Scotia, the George King Schools Act in New Brunswick, regulation 17 in Ontario, and so forth. While these laws did not apply in Quebec, French-language education was largely underfunded, as it is today. There was practically no French-language instruction until 1875.

In light of this historical context, the implementation of the Official Languages Act in 1969 and the official languages in education program, or OLEP, in 1970 appears even more disparaging and disrespectful towards Quebec. Instead of repairing the harms caused by 200 years of underfunding a French-language education system in Quebec, the government of the Canadian majority chose to impose a program designed to perpetuate the preferential financing of the English-language education system and English as a second language for all Quebecers. To this day, the continuum of education in English in Quebec is more reflective of this majority aspect.

In closing, while the federal government's modernized Official Languages Act has recognized, as you all have, the decline of French and its minority status even in Quebec, and despite the fact that Ottawa should also be defending and promoting French, nothing has changed. Federal funding for official languages in Quebec is entirely allocated to the development of English-speaking communities and to promoting English. Specifically, the official languages in education program is almost exclusively earmarked for the anglophone education system and English as a second language.

• (1120)

The Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Montréal has been defending French in Quebec for 200 years and has never received a penny from Canada to support French. We are only participating in these consultations to deliver the message that if your actions hinder the protection of the French language in Quebec, you risk writing yet another dark chapter in our history. You're familiar with this history and so you're accountable. You have the power to change the trend.

However, in our opinion at Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Montréal, right now, the only way for us to ensure the viability of the French language on North American soil—and this will come as no great surprise—is for francophone Quebec to become a country.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Alepin.

We are now going into members' question time.

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

**Joël Godin:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ladies, your testimony radiates passion, and that's inspiring. We bring this kind of passion to our committee, but you no doubt exemplify it daily in your environment.

My first question is for Ms. Arseneau-Sluyter.

Based on what you have said, there is an unfortunate lack of clear accountability in the area of early childhood. Can you tell us more about that?

**Nicole Arseneau-Sluyter:** I'll refer that question to Mr. Chaisson.

**Ali Chaisson (Executive Director, Acadian Society of New Brunswick):** Thank you for that question, Mr. Godin.

I think the time has come to—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry to interrupt you, Mr. Chaisson, but we can't hear you clearly. I've stopped the clock. Please give us a cou-

ple of minutes to resolve the technical issue and we'll get back to you.

I hereby suspend the meeting.

• (1120)

(Pause)

• (1125)

**The Chair:** I call the meeting back to order.

Mr. Godin, you used 40 seconds of your speaking time.

We'll go back to you, Mr. Chaisson.

**Ali Chaisson:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for the question, Mr. Godin.

For many years, the primary concern has been the way funding flows from Ottawa to the provinces and especially how it reaches these provinces' current accounts. We could give you all sorts of examples where the amounts allocated by Ottawa don't align with what actually makes it to communities and particularly to French-language school boards.

For example, there have been instances where the provinces have used the monies allocated by the federal government through the official languages in education program, OLEP, to fund expenditures that would ordinarily fall under provincial jurisdiction. For example, if an English-language school board has a computer specialist, it goes without saying that the French-language school board would similarly be entitled to have a computer specialist paid for with taxpayer dollars. There are many examples of this type of situation.

I have a feeling that early childhood education is the next area where we are going to run into problems. I'm not sure we'll have the ability to keep track of these millions of dollars from the federal government meant to fund day care spaces and that the amount from Ottawa will align with the amount that actually makes its way to day cares and early childhood centres. As such—

**Joël Godin:** I'm sorry to interrupt you, Mr. Chaisson. I do understand what you're saying. In short, when it comes to early childhood, funding from the federal government does not align with the monies that are actually allocated on the ground in the province.

**Ali Chaisson:** That's correct.

**Joël Godin:** Doesn't the modernized Official Languages Act fix that?

**Ali Chaisson:** We'll see how that pans out, but each additional intermediary between the source and the recipient of funding adds to the overall cost. The only way to truly fix this problem is to allow for direct agreements between the federal government and French-language school boards, which have the same legal responsibilities as other Crown agencies in the province in finance and financial audit matters.

The time has come to change how the federal government engages with official language minority communities.

**Joël Godin:** Currently, what kind of support does the Conseil scolaire francophone du Nouveau Brunswick get from the province?

**Ali Chaisson:** For now, I think New Brunswick probably has a unique situation because there are two sectors within the department of education. Francophone school boards deal exclusively with the department's francophone sector while anglophone school boards deal exclusively with the department's anglophone sector.

I get the sense that people in Moncton, Fredericton and Saint John get by well enough. Obviously, the challenges are steep. We don't necessarily expect to have the same configuration in 2025 as we did in 2005 or 1985. Society is changing. There is enormous pressure on school districts to provide programming tailored to an evolving society and—

• (1130)

**Joël Godin:** Thank you, Mr. Chaisson. As you know, my time is very limited. I only have a minute left and I'd like to hear from Ms. Arseneau-Sluyter, the president of your society.

Earlier, you said that 1,000 rights holders in New Brunswick did not have access to education in French. Is the situation getting better or worse?

**Nicole Arseneau-Sluyter:** We have just completed a survey. When I spoke about 1,000 rights holder, I was referring only to the city of Saint John and surrounding areas, and not to New Brunswick as a whole.

You may not know this, but there are no francophone schools outside Saint John. It's a large area stretching from Sussex to St. Stephen and all the way north of Fredericton to Grand-Sault, yet people there still don't have access to French-language schools.

I was alluding to a survey that focused on our city because the school is overcrowded.

**Joël Godin:** My understanding is that the situation is worse and more dire.

What we are hearing is that there is no collaboration or co-operation, as you said at the beginning of your opening remarks, to help francophone communities in New Brunswick thrive. You would also like the number of intermediaries cut down as a way to enhance efficiencies. Have I understood you correctly?

**Nicole Arseneau-Sluyter:** Absolutely. Currently, there is a direct contribution to assimilation.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Godin. Your time is up.

Ms. Chenette now has the floor for six minutes.

**Madeleine Chenette (Thérèse-De Blainville, Lib.):** Good day.

I would like to thank the witnesses for helping us understand the situation. There is a palpable sense of passion in the air.

I would like to continue along the same lines as Mr. Godin and address my questions to the representatives of the Acadian Society of New Brunswick.

You summed up the current issue quite well, but I would like to delve further into the subject.

It's important to acknowledge the call from francophone school boards to receive funding directly. Do you have support from the private sector or are they neutral? Do you collaborate and engage

with private sector partners to promote the vibrancy of our beautiful French language, highlighting it as both a valuable export asset and a gateway to working with other provinces across our beautiful Canada? Is this something the private sector considers already resolved or it is not a priority for them?

**Nicole Arseneau-Sluyter:** Would you like to know whether we have support from the private sector?

**Madeleine Chenette:** Yes, that's right.

**Nicole Arseneau-Sluyter:** Of course, a significant share of assistance to schools comes from the community, but this is primarily the case in majority francophone areas. However, as you know, the linguistic landscape in New Brunswick is fairly unique. The majority of francophones are found in the north. Those who live in Saint John, like me—I have lived there since 1987—are in a very small minority. It's therefore quite hard to approach private businesses for donations for our school, our school centre or anything else. That is why we need more funding and assistance if we really want to slow down the assimilation of francophones.

**Madeleine Chenette:** I was not trying to find out if you ask for money from the private sector, but rather, if the private sector could put pressure on the government, insofar as businesses see the benefit of having people who speak English and French. In this sense, it would be an asset.

If the government retains a portion of the funds it receives before distributing the remainder to school boards, which stakeholders might be instrumental in helping improve the situation?

**Nicole Arseneau-Sluyter:** I know that private businesses are always looking for French-speaking employees. It's not easy either, especially in majority anglophone areas.

• (1135)

**Madeleine Chenette:** You alluded briefly to the issue of talent. Is attracting talent with the right skills in sectors ranging from early childhood to university a challenge? What are the biggest challenges to attracting talent in education and having the infrastructure to provide services in French?

**Nicole Arseneau-Sluyter:** There is a clear need for teachers and personnel, from early childhood education to the university level across New Brunswick.

Saint John has the largest francophone early childhood centre in the province and the majority of our employees, or over 50%, are francophone immigrants from other parts of the world. Immigration is therefore very important to ensuring the survival of French in New Brunswick.

I can assure you that with the next census, the percentage of francophones in New Brunswick will fall below 30%, which will be a big drop for us. To what extent can we say that our province is bilingual? That is troubling.

**Madeleine Chenette:** I'd like to build on that reasoning to talk about the province's commitments. Some of the experts who have appeared before the committee essentially share your views and have said the Government of Canada should provide funding to school boards directly. If the Government of Canada takes that step, how will accountability be ensured? Accountability is the intermediary measure needed to properly monitor where monies are spent. What would be the benefit of sending money directly compared to the current situation?

**Nicole Arseneau-Sluyter:** There is certainly a clear need for funding. I don't know if you are aware, but in New Brunswick, early childhood education is not covered by the Education Act or by linguistic duality. This is even more worrying for us and puts us at risk. Will all of our child care services use federal funding to continue to teach children French? What control mechanisms will be in place in this regard? I think we need to discuss this issue, because it's making us feel somewhat insecure.

**Madeleine Chenette:** In the same vein, the new version of the Official Languages Act refers to the education continuum, as you mentioned. Do you think that section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms should explicitly apply to early childhood and post-secondary education?

**Nicole Arseneau-Sluyter:** Section 23 of the charter applies to all stages of life, from birth to death.

**Madeleine Chenette:** Do you therefore think it should be used in that sense?

**Nicole Arseneau-Sluyter:** Absolutely.

**Madeleine Chenette:** What barriers are preventing New Brunswick from complying with the act?

**Nicole Arseneau-Sluyter:** That's a good question, and I don't know the answer. We do have some concerns, though.

**Madeleine Chenette:** Okay.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Chenette.

I now give the floor to Mr. Beaulieu for six minutes.

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

My first question is for Ms. Alepin.

You spoke at length about the history of Acadia, and it's quite tragic. Ms. Arseneau-Sluyter also touched on this subject.

Do you have any more recent examples of underfunding of French-language schools, including post-secondary institutions?

**Marie-Anne Alepin:** As I mentioned, it's as though this distortion, which has persisted for 200 years, continues today. It's truly unfortunate.

I can't explain why the official languages in education program, or OLEP, is entirely dedicated to the English-language education system and English as a second language.

The Official Languages Act protects minority languages. The Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Montréal is very pleased that the minority French language is better protected in minority communities outside Quebec.

However, it is as if there were suddenly a barrier in Quebec and as if English were the language in danger of disappearing; and yet you know very well that the French language is facing a major challenge in Quebec. The French language and culture are interconnected and go hand in hand. If one declines, the other declines as well. We are in this spirit of decline.

The Official Languages Act and the OLEP are therefore not aligned.

I have some data that I would like to share with you. In terms of university funding, if we assume that anglophones make up an average of 8.5% of Quebec's population, overall, English-language institutions received funding equivalent to 3.5 times the relative demographic weight of anglophones from 2000 to 2017. Francophones received a much smaller share of federal research funds than they should have.

This distortion has existed for a long time and this trend must be reversed. You also have a duty to do that. You have the power to change the elements of this program.

● (1140)

**Mario Beaulieu:** I have another question which representatives from both organizations could answer.

Starting in 1969, the Official Languages Act sought to support English in Quebec and French outside Quebec. In addition, we know that throughout history, the Saint-Jean-Baptiste Society has also been involved in Acadia and elsewhere.

What impact has the new Official Languages Act had on the solidarity between groups that champion French in Quebec and outside Quebec?

**Marie-Anne Alepin:** I'll start.

Regional school boards were created in Quebec around the same time. From the outset, the distribution of resources to form linguistic school boards was problematic. The MEMO, or the Mouvement pour une école moderne et ouverte, regularly deplored the fact that even within the Commission des écoles catholiques de Montréal, the CÉCM, anglophones were receiving preferential treatment over francophones. The problem therefore dates back to that time. There was already an issue with the distribution of resources between the two groups.

**Mario Beaulieu:** Perhaps my question was not specific enough.

Francophones outside Quebec have often said they feel abandoned by Quebec. Quebec has heard similar sentiments.

Didn't the Official Languages Act create a bit of tension between francophones in Quebec and francophones outside Quebec, even though, as the motto says, unity is strength?

**Marie-Anne Alepin:** Yes. I wouldn't go so far as to say that it has led to a rift, but it definitely had an impact. Earlier, Mr. Godin mentioned that the French language was a sensitive issue. It is sensitive, but I also think that everyone around the table agrees that the French language should be protected and defended, at least I hope so.

In my opinion, the Official Languages Act really divided francophones across Canada when it was enacted in 1969. The Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Montréal has a fund, the Fondation pour la langue française, which originated from the Fonds Langelier. Every year, we support organizations outside Quebec that defend the French language. This fund is intended to be a link that we are creating to continue trying to counter, in a way, this more questionable episode.

**Mario Beaulieu:** Would you like to add anything, Ms. Arsenau-Sluyter?

**Nicole Arsenau-Sluyter:** I think we need to work together. Unity is strength, that is obvious. Even today, many of our francophone students study in Quebec. We don't offer all programs at the University of Moncton, our Acadian university. It's therefore important that we work together.

Moreover, we see the influence of the Internet on our children. We see what is happening. People are increasingly speaking English. Even in Quebec, which is predominantly francophone, the French language is at risk. It's therefore important that we always work together.

It's obvious that in New Brunswick, our laws have greatly improved our education system, but as you have heard me say, there is still much to be done.

**The Chair:** Your time is up, Mr. Beaulieu.

**Mario Beaulieu:** Thank you. I'll get back to that in the next round.

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

We will now move on to the second round of questions. Colleagues, given that we have 15 minutes left with this panel of witnesses, I propose that we shorten the round, as we have done before, while maintaining the proportion between the parties. I therefore propose that the Conservatives and Liberals each have three minutes and that Mr. Beaulieu have one and a half minutes. That way, we can finish the—

**Mario Beaulieu:** I will just have to speak faster.

**The Chair:** That's right.

I now give the floor to Mr. Bélanger.

**Joël Godin:** Excuse me, Mr. Chair. There are 15 minutes left, but the time you have allocated totals barely eight minutes.

**The Chair:** No. In the second round, I will give the floor to five members in the following order: the Conservative Party, the Liberal Party, the Bloc Québécois, the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party.

• (1145)

**Joël Godin:** All right, that's fine.

**The Chair:** I'm proposing 14 or 15 minutes. The clerk has checked the time calculation for me, so I am confident.

**Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC):** Will we have another round?

**The Chair:** During this round, Mr. Bélanger, Mr. Villeneuve, Mr. Beaulieu, Mr. Dalton, and Ms. Mingarelli will have the opportunity to ask questions.

**Marc Dalton:** It could be four minutes, four minutes and two minutes, or something like that.

**The Chair:** I suggest three minutes, since time is already running out.

Mr. Bélanger, you have three minutes.

**Jim Bélanger (Sudbury East—Manitoulin—Nickel Belt, CPC):** Good day.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank the witnesses. My question is for Ms. Alepin.

You mentioned that anglophones are a minority in Quebec, but you think that doesn't really count, since anglophones are far greater in number and the majority in Canada. You say that anglophones influence the school system and the education continuum.

**Marie-Anne Alepin:** What is your question?

**Mario Beaulieu:** He's asking you if that is indeed what you think.

**Marie-Anne Alepin:** Yes.

**Jim Bélanger:** All right.

You also say that federal funds go entirely to anglophones in Quebec.

**Marie-Anne Alepin:** It's a fact, not an opinion.

**Jim Bélanger:** All right.

As you say, this distortion has persisted for 200 years. What should be done to improve the situation?

**Marie-Anne Alepin:** I'm counting on each and every one of you to turn this trend around. As I said, the French language has been in decline for a very long time. It's as if there were an unconscious bias—

**Jim Bélanger:** I'm asking you all these questions to get to my real question.

I come from a region in northern Ontario where French is widely spoken. You are calling for Quebec to become a country. I totally disagree with that, because outside Quebec, we need Quebec's support for the French-speaking community to survive.

**Marie-Anne Alepin:** I understand. I'll explain my point of view after you have asked your question.

**Jim Bélanger:** Okay.

I'm looking more for solutions to promote French in Quebec while ensuring the survival of the French-speaking community outside Quebec.

**Marie-Anne Alepin:** I'm so glad you asked me that question.

When Quebec becomes a country and controls all the levers to administer all its laws, which will no longer be gutted by the federal government, we will have the ability to have proper control over the French language and to enhance its vitality. We will then be able to continue working with the Canadian francophonie and become stronger. Right now, we are fading away, and the only solution is for Quebec to be master of its own future, be it over its territory, its laws, the French language or its values. That is how we will be able to continue to collaborate with the rest of the French-speaking world, as we have been doing since well before this Parliament was created.

**Jim Bélanger:** There may be a way to find a solution without Quebec leaving Canada.

**The Chair:** Mr. Bélanger, your time is up. I'm sorry.

I now give the floor to Mr. Villeneuve for three minutes.

**Louis Villeneuve (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Arseneau-Sluyter, I will ask you a question, and then I will give the rest of my time to my colleague from New Brunswick, because I think he will want to continue the discussion with you.

In December 2024, the New Brunswick government announced the construction of two French-language schools in the southern part of the province, one in the Sussex-Hampton area and one in the southwest, where the communities of St. Stephen, Saint Andrews and St. George are located. I have had the opportunity to visit the magnificent community of Saint Andrews.

Can you explain how these new schools will change your reality?

**Nicole Arseneau-Sluyter:** It's important to understand that this is a very large region. The government's announcement regarding the construction of schools in this area is excellent news. I know people in Sussex whose children are enrolled in a French immersion program, even though they are francophone. These children do not yet have access to French-language education.

While these schools are yet to be established, we have one in Quispamsis and another in Saint John. However, the Samuel-de-Champlain School Centre in Saint John was built to accommodate approximately 400 students, but it now has more than 1,000. The children and staff operate from closets and washrooms. It's almost unbearable. No expansion plans for this centre have been announced. The Samuel-de-Champlain Community School Centre is also housed in the same building.

In 1987, when I was in charge of school transportation, some children would travel from St. George to Saint John. That's not normal. They can do it for some time, but after a while, these children end up going to the English school in their neighbourhood.

I could talk about this at length because child care centres are also at full capacity. The question then is, what do we do? Assimilation continues.

When you are in a minority situation, as is the case in Saint John and Fredericton, New Brunswick, it is difficult to live in French. You need to begin each day by reminding yourself to work hard. I have a daughter who is now 31, and I managed to raise her to be perfectly bilingual and proud to be Acadian, even though her father

is anglophone and doesn't speak French. So, it wasn't just school that enabled my daughter to become bilingual; my family did as well and I have poured a lot of energy into that throughout her life.

• (1150)

**Louis Villeneuve:** Thank you very much.

I don't know if there is any time left for my colleague.

**The Chair:** There are four seconds left.

**Louis Villeneuve:** You have four seconds, Mr. Deschênes-Thériault.

**Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.):** I would like to thank the witnesses for coming here today. It's always a pleasure to welcome Acadians to the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

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

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

Can you tell me briefly how French is doing in Montreal's francophone schools?

**Marie-Anne Alepin:** The French language is struggling pretty much everywhere in Montreal and the rest of Quebec and the same is true in schools. I had the pleasure of shooting a documentary called *Vox Populibre* in CEGEPs across Quebec. It's on TVA+ and illico+, if you'd like to watch it. I don't have any statistics, but students told me they speak English regularly and that English is becoming an increasingly important part of their lives. Obviously, this doesn't help us. That's why we need laws to protect us. By "protect us", I mean the French language.

**Mario Beaulieu:** I would like to ask Ms. Arseneau-Sluyter a very quick question.

You spoke to the need for reparation in response to the deliberate historical assimilation of Acadians. Do you feel that the New Brunswick government is genuinely committed to making reparations?

**The Chair:** Please respond very quickly, as there are only 15 seconds left.

**Nicole Arseneau-Sluyter:** I'm sure it is, but more needs to be done. What is currently being done is far from enough. Our children say it's "cool" to speak English.

**Marie-Anne Alepin:** I think it should be sexy to speak French.

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

Mr. Dalton, you have the floor for three minutes.

**Marc Dalton:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Arseneau-Sluyter, is it true that the Lieutenant Governor of New Brunswick doesn't speak French?

**Nicole Arseneau-Sluyter:** Ms. Louise Imbeault, the current Lieutenant Governor, is Acadian and is fluent in English and French. I think her predecessor, Ms. Brenda Murphy, who was appointed in 2021, was unilingual anglophone.

**Marc Dalton:** I see.

We have a similar situation at the federal level with a Governor General who does not speak French, but she does speak another language.

Do you think this shows a lack of commitment from the Liberal government towards francophone minority communities?

**Nicole Arseneau-Sluyter:** It just goes to show one thing: We continue to be at risk. We should continue to press this issue. We saw the ease with which a unilingual anglophone person was appointed to such an important position and that was in the only bilingual province in Canada. We experienced that.

**Marc Dalton:** Thank you very much.

Ms. Alepin, thank you for your testimony.

When I was young, which is not that long ago, I went to an anglophone school in Abitibi when my dad was with the Canadian Armed Forces. It was a very old Catholic school. There was also a Protestant school for anglophones and a brand new comprehensive school.

You spoke about underfunding from the federal government, but isn't this area under provincial jurisdiction?

• (1155)

**Marie-Anne Alepin:** No, Quebec doesn't distort our funding. The distortion really comes from the federal government. We could also talk about spending authority and Canadian Heritage. Our schools are really underfunded.

**Marc Dalton:** How much time do I have left, Mr. Chair?

**The Chair:** You have 45 seconds.

**Marc Dalton:** Okay.

I used to be a teacher and I also worked for the British Columbia provincial government, and so I know that funding is provided by the province. Education falls under provincial jurisdiction. It's important to point this out. At the time, schools were divided into two systems: Catholic schools and Protestant schools. I only want to point out that this is a provincial, not federal responsibility. Yes, the federal government provides some funding for minority language communities, but it's not much.

**The Chair:** Your time is up, Mr. Dalton. Thank you very much.

Ms. Mingarelli, you have the floor for three minutes.

**Giovanna Mingarelli (Prescott—Russell—Cumberland, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all witnesses for joining us today.

I have questions for Ms. Arseneau-Sluyter and Mr. Chaisson.

In your opinion, what would a francophone education system that is in full compliance with the Constitution look like in New Brunswick? From your perspective, what would be the priority investments or reforms to achieve this vision?

**Nicole Arseneau-Sluyter:** In the current economic climate in Canada, I think it's more important than ever to be bilingual and to have the ability to use English and French domestically and internationally.

Anglophones can easily live without speaking French. It's far too easy.

We need French immersion for francophones in New Brunswick if we want to survive. Given the current shortage, it's important to prepare teachers who are equipped to teach in any setting. If I had to put a price on that, I would say that regardless of the cost, be it \$1, \$2 million or \$2 billion, this should be done promptly before it is too late.

**Giovanna Mingarelli:** District education councils, or CEDs, have an important cultural and community role. What additional human resources would be required to ensure they carry out these responsibilities more effectively?

**Nicole Arseneau-Sluyter:** I know we are doing a lot of francization in New Brunswick, and that requires more employees. The fact is that many school-based kindergartens have a lot of children who do not speak French at all. Anglophones definitely don't have these challenges when children come to school, except when it comes to allophone immigrants. That is why more investments are needed in this area.

**The Chair:** You have 30 seconds left, Ms. Mingarelli.

**Giovanna Mingarelli:** I don't have anything else to add.

Thank you very much.

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

I would like to thank the witnesses on behalf of the committee.

We'll suspend the meeting for a few minutes to bring in our second panel.

• (1155)

(Pause)

• (1210)

**The Chair:** We are resuming meeting number 10 of the Standing Committee on Official Languages. We are continuing our study on the minority-language continuum.

I would now like to welcome the witnesses for the second hour of our meeting.

First, we have two representatives of the Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie Britannique, namely Ms. Marie-Pierre Lavoie, president, and Ms. Pascale Bernier, who is the superintendent and is joining us by video conference.

We also have two representatives of the University of Moncton, namely Mr. Mathieu Lang, who is the dean of the faculty of education, and Mr. Denis Prud'homme, the rector and vice-chancellor. Both of them are joining us by video conference.

Welcome to the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

Each organization will have five minutes for its opening remarks. We will then proceed with a question and answer period with committee members.

Ms. Lavoie, you have the floor for five minutes.

**Marie-Pierre Lavoie (President, Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Honourable members, good afternoon. Thank you very much for giving us the opportunity to testify on behalf of the Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie Britannique, the CSF.

I am the president of the CSF and I'm here with the CSF superintendent, Ms. Pascale Bernier.

The French version of the brief prepared by the CSF was emailed to the committee, which will make arrangements for translation.

The CSF is the only francophone school board in the province. It manages 47 French-language schools and serves nearly 6,000 students.

The French-language education continuum, from early childhood to the post-secondary level, is central to the mission of the CSF.

As you will see in our brief, two parliamentary committees on official languages have studied issues around the education continuum many times.

What is new, however, is that the legal framework in which the questions now arise has changed because of the following three factors: first, the modernization of the Official Languages Act in 2023; second, the enactment of the Canada Early Childhood Learning and Child Care Act in 2024; and third, recent case law developments on the statutory obligations of education stakeholders, such as majority-language school boards and the federal government, under section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Details on these three legal factors are included in our brief.

Although education is an area of provincial jurisdiction, the federal government can and must give effect to its new obligations.

Issues related to the education continuum that affect the accessibility and quality of French-language services in a minority setting cannot depend on five-year plans arising from the policy decisions of each government.

The survival of French in British Columbia and other parts of Canada, as we heard earlier, requires permanent, sustainable solutions.

The CSF has addressed three issues in its brief.

The first issue concerns recommendations on the official languages in education program, the OLEP, which governs federal funding to support minority language education. Our recommendations aim to address the long-standing and systemic deficiencies described in our brief and in various reports prepared by this committee.

The CSF has three recommendations. First, that the next protocol be dedicated exclusively to education in the minority language; second, that minority school boards be parties to this new protocol and all resulting bilateral agreements; and third, that the proportion of

funding allocated to second-language instruction, which receives over \$10 million under the protocol in British Columbia, and the proportion of funding allocated to minority-language education, which receives just over \$6 million, be reversed. This means that right now, the minority language receives 38% of core federal funding.

The CSF is also calling for an increase in core funding and additional funding for minority-language instruction. The CSF needs an increase in the core federal funding it will receive under the next protocol to truly advance the vitality of the francophone minority in British Columbia.

It's especially galling to see that the additional funding allocated under the protocol in table 2 of our brief is strongly tipped in favour of second-language instruction and is four times higher than for minority-language education. I will say that again: it's four times higher.

Second, the CSF calls on the committee to recommend that the federal government uphold its commitment to maintain long-term funding for early childhood services in French in British Columbia and other parts of the country.

Of the 36 CSF elementary schools, only half offer day care or pre-kindergarten. Where child care centres exist, they have long waiting lists.

The CSF is looking to expand early childhood services in French across the province. For example, it plans to launch a program for four-year-olds in five schools starting in January 2026. However, this initiative requires additional stable funding beyond the five-year period of the agreement signed between the federal government and the provinces.

Third, the CSF wishes to ensure that future censuses contain the same questions to enumerate all the children of rights holders under section 23 of the Charter.

The data is crucial for targeting underserved and unserved communities as part of financial planning.

The 2021 census shows that more than 43,000 children aged 5 to 17 are eligible for French-language education in British Columbia, but the CSF reaches only 14% of them.

• (1215)

I'd like to use the rest of my time to bring another issue to your attention. The CSF would also benefit from other initiatives that have been raised by other stakeholders, such as stable, long-term federal government funding for the training of French-speaking early childhood school staff and educators. To—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry to interrupt you, but your time is up. Please wrap up your remarks. You'll have a chance to provide more details during members' question period.

**Marie-Pierre Lavoie:** Okay. I just have one more sentence.

In closing, the CSF needs the necessary school personnel to fulfill its mission.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. That was quick. My apologies for interrupting you.

I'll now give the floor to the witnesses from the University of Moncton.

**Denis Prud'homme (Rector and Vice-Chancellor, University of Moncton):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll begin by saying that it's important for us to remember that based on the most recent Canadian population survey, just 27.7% of New Brunswick residents spoke French at home in 2024, a decline from 31.5% in 1991.

Other figures are equally alarming: 62% of francophone adults in New Brunswick have difficulty understanding and using written texts and 69% have challenges with basic math.

When it comes to training, like other francophone universities and colleges outside Quebec, the University of Moncton was established to increase access for francophones to post-secondary education in French outside Quebec, particularly to address human resources needs in urban areas and in the regions in critical sectors like health and education.

We project that New Brunswick will need nearly 700 new teachers in francophone schools across the province by 2028. The University of Moncton currently provides less than 50% of these resources, even though 79% of our graduates stay within the province after their studies and work in the New Brunswick school system, compared to 40% of anglophone graduates.

The University of Moncton has three campuses in Edmundston, Shippagan and Moncton. When the university was established in 1963, the Université de Moncton Act enacted by the New Brunswick government restricted our campuses in the north to exclusively offering the first two years of undergraduate programs and allowed them to offer some programs leading to the bachelor's degree. When it comes to training in education, and in particular for the elementary level, our campuses can offer the first three years of the five-year program.

In addition, the University of Moncton offers nearly 190 programs.

Like our colleagues in other universities, we do not project a population increase in the north of New Brunswick over the next 10 years, unlike the southern part of the province, which is experiencing most of the demographic growth.

Another important factor worth mentioning is that for demographic reasons, we have a limited pool from which to recruit prospective teachers in New Brunswick. We have to recruit international students.

For example, in the area of health care, only one in eight students at the University of Moncton is enrolled in nursing. We were therefore forced to recruit internationally to meet provincial needs. In an effort to attract international students, we introduced a scholarship program that lowers their fees to match those paid by Canadian students. This initiative has led to some notable outcomes, and we

now have over 200 international students in our nursing programs, and they are doing very well. The scholarship program is one way of attracting and encouraging students to enrol in nursing.

However, at the moment, we don't have the option of offering similar scholarships to attract and encourage international students to pursue careers in teaching and education.

In closing, I would like to point out that federal regulations prohibit the use of funding provided under the official languages in education program to offer scholarships and incentives to recruit, or promote the retention of, international students.

• (1220)

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Prud'homme.

I now yield the floor to members of the committee, and they will ask you questions.

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

**Marc Dalton:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank the witnesses very much, especially Ms. Bernier and Ms. Lavoie, who are from British Columbia like me.

There has just been a vote on the budget, and there will be no general election for the time being. However, inflation is a very important concern for my party, the Conservative Party of Canada. Large deficits like the ones we have worsen inflation.

Can you tell us a bit about the cost and effects of inflation on the Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique? Is it a reality or not?

**Marie-Pierre Lavoie:** Absolutely, inflation is a reality in our school board. Time and again, we have had to explain to the provincial government how much our transportation costs had increased due to inflation. We had to show them repeatedly to make them understand, when everyone is experiencing this inflation. So, it's something that concerns us a lot.

It also affects the OLEP, the official languages in education program. Inflation is driving up costs, but the funding we receive under the OLEP hasn't increased at the same rate as inflation.

We feel the effects of inflation twice rather than once.

**Marc Dalton:** Thank you very much for your answer.

I will now address the other witnesses.

Can you talk to us about the effects of inflation? Is it a reality for you or is it negligible for your institution?

• (1225)

**Denis Prud'homme:** Yes, post-secondary educational institutions are experiencing the effects of inflation, as grant amounts have remained the same for several years. Last year, for the first time in 20 years, there was an increase in the grants awarded under this program. Obviously, that increase doesn't allow us to fully catch up with the effects of inflation, but it does lighten the fiscal burden a bit.

**Marc Dalton:** You say the amounts of the grants are stable but, in reality, that stability amounts to a decrease in funding and puts greater pressure on your university, on the Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique, in short, on everything.

I have another question for the representatives of the Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique.

Can you tell us a bit about the importance of immigration in schools in British Columbia? Is the number of newcomers important? What is the proportion of newcomers in the schools in your school board?

**Marie-Pierre Lavoie:** As for the percentage, I'll have to ask Ms. Bernier to respond to you.

For my part, I can tell you that we still have a lot of work to do at the provincial level to make immigrants aware that we exist. Indeed, immigrants may not necessarily know that there is a French school board.

We also need to take action at the federal level. During the welcome process, newcomers should be informed that there are French-language school boards in the provinces and territories, and that their children can attend them.

Ms. Bernier, I don't know if you can give us the requested percentage, as I don't have it on the tip of my tongue.

**Pascale Bernier (Superintendant, Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique):** I don't have it either, Ms. Lavoie.

However, I can indicate that the proportion has really increased. We have designed various tools and systems to support immigrant families. In addition, as Ms. Lavoie said, we must continue our efforts to ensure that these people feel good and feel at home within the Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique.

**Marc Dalton:** I would like to talk about the money given to the provinces to support official language minority communities.

I know that, for English school boards, it goes through the province, and it seems that not all the money is distributed very well.

Is that true for you too? Do you know the amount you should receive, or is it unclear for you?

**Marie-Pierre Lavoie:** Nothing is clear.

What we know is that, right now, we're receiving 38% of what is allocated to the province under the OLEP. Immersion programs receive much more funding than francophone minority language education programs.

How is that possible? It's very confusing. We ask questions, but we never get clear answers. So we're in the dark.

You say that's how it's done for English school boards. It definitely happens like that for us too.

**Marc Dalton:** It's a provincial responsibility, but it's always the federal government that provides the funding.

Do you think the federal government could be more specific about how to allocate the money?

**Marie-Pierre Lavoie:** I think so, yes. Furthermore, that's what we want. We'd like the federal government to be able to demand greater accountability from the provinces and territories. We'd like to be part of those discussions and the agreement, and understand how the funds are distributed so we can move forward.

It's about money that doesn't go back to the students. School boards are there first and foremost to serve the students. When we don't have all the money we should be entitled to, it's the students who pay the price.

**Marc Dalton:** Thank you very much,

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

Mr. Deschênes-Thériault, you have the floor for six minutes.

• (1230)

**Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I thank the witnesses.

I'm very pleased that the committee is hearing from witnesses from the University of Moncton today. By the way, I am myself a graduate of the University of Moncton, where I obtained a bachelor's degree a few years ago.

Of course, the University of Moncton has a campus in Moncton, but also two campuses in the north of the province, one in Shippagan and one in Edmundston, in my riding.

I'd like you to explain to us why it's important for the University of Moncton to have a physical presence in our francophone communities in the north of the province through these campuses, which offer full or partial programs. What are the impacts on the vitality of Acadian and Brayon francophone communities in the north of the province?

**Denis Prud'homme:** These campuses are extremely important, both educationally and economically. I think they greatly contribute to cultural and sporting life. They bring in part-time labour to support private businesses. They also contribute to the retention of graduates in the communities, whenever possible. For example, the retention rate of registered nurses in Edmundston is over 90%. The campuses therefore meet regional needs in various sectors.

**Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault:** As you mentioned, in the northern campuses, it's currently possible to take the first years of the Bachelor of Primary Education program. How would the offering of a comprehensive primary education program in northern New Brunswick strengthen the provision of education programs and also enhance the continuum of francophone education in New Brunswick?

**Denis Prud'homme:** I'll ask my colleague, who is the dean of the Faculty of Education, to answer this question.

**Mathieu Lang (Dean, Faculty of Education, University of Moncton):** In short, the best way to make things easier over the short term would be to increase our capacity to award degrees.

Most students come to Moncton when it's time to do placements, for example. So we're short on placement spots. Being closer to the District scolaire francophone du Nord-Ouest and the District scolaire francophone Nord-Est would increase the number of placement opportunities.

The rector spoke of a retention rate of 90% in nursing. I don't have the statistics, but I'm almost certain that everyone who starts a teaching program in Edmundston or Shippagan works in the province after graduating, and that almost all work in the region where they were trained.

The campuses participated in a strategic planning exercise and it became clear that, obviously, if the campuses in the north of the province did not exist, they would need to be built.

**Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault:** I completely agree with you. In my riding, Madawaska—Restigouche, the Edmundston campus of the University of Moncton is an essential institution for the vitality of our region.

Just recently, we received excellent news: The University of Moncton has been awarded its first Canada research chair outside its Moncton campus. Indeed, Professor Rose Kikpa Bio is now the holder of the Canada Research Chair in Development and Territorial Issues in Contemporary Acadia. Coming from an academic background, I welcomed this news very positively.

In your opinion, how do federal research support funds, particularly through Canada research chairs, help present campuses as hubs of research excellence and, as such, increase their appeal to a potential student population?

**Denis Prud'homme:** As you know, the University of Moncton was established in 1963 to meet professional workforce needs in various regions of New Brunswick. Then, in the 1970s and 1980s, research gradually took hold there. Now, we can say that we truly have a university that has a dual mission of education and research.

However, research took a bit longer to establish itself on our campuses in the north of the province. Due to the limited number of professors on these campuses, education accounts for the vast majority of their workload.

The federal funds we request help lighten the teaching load to allow professors time to dedicate to their research. Thus, at the Shippagan campus, we now have a research hub in artificial intelligence, while the Edmundston campus has a critical mass of re-

search in history, linguistics and Acadian studies. This helps enrich education and increase the attractiveness of these campuses.

• (1235)

**Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault:** In your opening remarks, you mentioned the issue of scholarships. How could federal funding to support scholarship programs be improved to better meet the needs of the University of Moncton?

**Denis Prud'homme:** As I mentioned earlier, for demographic reasons, we lack candidates in New Brunswick to fill our positions in key sectors such as health and education. However, most international students are more interested in administration and engineering programs. If we want them to be interested in other programs, we need to offer them scholarships to reduce their tuition fees and make them comparable to those paid by Canadian students.

I can give you an example where such scholarships had a significant impact. I was able to negotiate with the government of New Brunswick and secure 25 scholarships per year for the next 10 years. These scholarships were awarded very quickly. We have concentrated the largest number of these scholarships in Edmundston and Shippagan to attract students to these northern campuses, which—

**The Chair:** Mr. Prud'homme, excuse me for interrupting you, but Mr. Deschênes-Thériault's time is up. I even gave you a little bit more.

**Denis Prud'homme:** No problem.

**The Chair:** I now give the floor to Mr. Beaulieu for six minutes.

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

Mr. Prud'homme, you said that about 27% of Acadians spoke primarily French at home, compared to about 31% before. Can you give us more information about that?

**Denis Prud'homme:** The proportion I mentioned fell from 31.5% to 27.7% in 2021. We can assume that this decline is continuing at present. A bit like everywhere else in Canada, there's an anglicization of the new generation.

There's also a lot of competition among post-secondary educational institutions. Anglophone universities are reaching out to Acadian students by offering them substantial scholarships. So, some choose to continue their studies in English instead of coming to the University of Moncton. That's why, this year, we're trying to increase the scholarships we offer, to be more competitive.

You know, every year, between 150 and 200 Acadian students apply for admission to the University of Moncton and are accepted, but do not show up in September. This means that they were approached by other universities. Sometimes, they're francophone universities, like Université Laval, but they're often anglophone universities because they offer much larger scholarships.

**Mario Beaulieu:** It's quite dramatic.

It is also interesting to note the trend that has been observed due to the famous provision that services must be offered to the minority where the numbers justify it. In other words, when French is in decline somewhere, there are fewer services in French, as they are less justified by the number of rights holders. So, instead of changing this criterion, there was a tendency to modify the indicators of linguistic vitality. People then started to consider the first official language spoken, for example. Recently, the potential demand for minority language services has even been added to the indicators. However, it conceals the decline of French. I think it's better to face reality and take action, rather than always quoting new statistics.

What we see is that the risk of assimilation is also concerning in New Brunswick and Acadia, the main locus of resistance for francophones outside Quebec.

**Denis Prud'homme:** You raise the issue of the definition of a francophone. There are about seven different definitions, and the percentage can vary from 15% to 20%, depending on the definition used. When trying to justify a service, the arguments presented often use the definition according to which the number of francophones will be highest. However, as you mentioned quite accurately, it can conceal a significant decrease in the number of people who speak French at home.

• (1240)

**Mario Beaulieu:** My next question is for Ms. Lavoie.

I find what you said very interesting. It has always appeared absurd to me that there is always, it seems, an increase in funding for the teaching of French as a second language, compared to education in French as a first language.

You said that education in the minority language received only 38% of base funding. Could you tell us a little more about this? The rest of the money would therefore be allocated to teaching French as a second language. Is that right?

**Marie-Pierre Lavoie:** In our province, we receive about \$6 million for education in the minority language, while that figure is just over \$10 million for the teaching of French as a second language.

**Mario Beaulieu:** So, according to what you're saying, all of the funding should instead be dedicated to education in the minority language.

**Marie-Pierre Lavoie:** In fact, we recommend at least a reversal of the percentages, meaning we should receive more funding than that allocated to the teaching of French as a second language.

**Mario Beaulieu:** You don't necessarily want to reduce funding for the teaching of French as a second language, but you at least want there to be enough funding for education in the minority language. Indeed, it is somewhat illogical to increase funding for French as a second language if funding for education in the minority language is insufficient.

I find it interesting because it's what we saw in the new approach that was adopted by Ms. Joly, among others. It was announced that funding for the teaching of French as a second language would be increased. On the other hand, nothing was announced for the funding of education in the minority language, although there has still been some increase, I believe.

**Marie-Pierre Lavoie:** The base funding hasn't really increased. We have received additional funds. In this respect, second language education receives four times more funding than education in the minority language. It's huge. Imagine everything we could offer if we had better funding.

It should be noted that the OLEP, the official languages in education program, does not target basic education. This aspect falls under provincial jurisdiction; that's agreed. The OLEP is for doing additional activities, to offer additional programs, to enhance what we should already be doing. Remember that, as a francophone school board, we have a dual mandate: language and culture. It's not just about teaching French. It's about teaching in French, but also about bringing to life all this culture, and francophone cultures, in fact. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, immigration brings many francophone cultures to our country.

So, to echo your words, we find it very absurd that French immersion receives four times more funding than the French-language school board.

**The Chair:** Mr. Beaulieu, your time is up. Thank you very much.

Colleagues, given the time we have left, about 16 minutes, I have a proposal for you for the second round of questions. Five members will speak, namely Mr. Godin, Ms. Mingarelli, Mr. Beaulieu, Mr. Bélanger, and Mr. Villeneuve. Normally, the Conservatives and the Liberals have five minutes, while the Bloc Québécois has two and a half minutes, but I propose to do the same as with the first group of witnesses, that is, three minutes for the Conservatives and the Liberals, and one and a half minutes for Mr. Beaulieu. I will thus reduce speaking times proportionally.

**Mario Beaulieu:** I would have preferred that we have speaking times of five minutes, five minutes, and two and a half minutes. Otherwise, I'm losing a lot of time.

**The Chair:** I understand, and I'm open to the will of the committee. I propose that the parties talk to each other if they want to change how we proceed. I respect the committee's wishes, but the committee's approval is needed to do it. Given the little time we have left, I suggest we do as I proposed for the 15 minutes we have remaining today. Next time, you can change the way we proceed if you want.

Does that work?

**Joël Godin:** I'll tell you: we will discuss it.

**Mario Beaulieu:** Perfect.

**The Chair:** Okay, thank you.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor for three minutes.

**Joël Godin:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll continue in the same vein as my colleague concerning the difference between funding for second-language education and funding for minority-language education.

I don't understand. Sincerely, Ms. Lavoie, I don't know what's happening in British Columbia. You constantly have to fight. You get court judgments, but you have to fight to have them applied. The situation in British Columbia is quite unique.

In fact, before going into more detail, I'd like to know the reasons for this situation.

**Marie-Pierre Lavoie:** That's a good question. Honestly, I don't know the reason for it. What I know is that, unfortunately, we always have to fight and we must never, ever give up. We're exhausted from having to fight.

**Joël Godin:** Doesn't this demonstrate a lack of will from the provincial government, the federal government or even both?

• (1245)

**Marie-Pierre Lavoie:** I think a large part falls to the provincial government, but the federal government also has its share in this.

**Joël Godin:** Is there currently an agreement between Canada and British Columbia that binds the two levels of government?

**Marie-Pierre Lavoie:** To my recollection, there isn't, but Ms. Bernier can correct me if I'm wrong.

**Pascale Bernier:** In fact, it depends on who you're talking to, Mr. Godin.

Let me explain. When we had meetings with representatives from the province, we were told that there was an agreement, but we can't find the published agreement.

**Joël Godin:** In that case, I understand the confusion somewhat.

When I look at the table presented in your brief, I see a disproportion in the funding. As you mentioned, minority-language education receives \$6 million, compared to \$10 million for second-language education.

In most other provinces and territories, minority-language education receives much more funding than second-language education.

There seems to be a lack of intention or will. We need to find out where we can intervene. Indeed, we want to help you because what you do is important.

**Marie-Pierre Lavoie:** I would add that we also need to take into account the province's contribution. Normally, according to that agreement, the province should provide the same amount as the federal government. So, if we receive \$6 million from the federal government, we should also receive \$6 million from the provincial government. When we ask the representatives of the province, we're told that we already receive that amount.

**Joël Godin:** So they're playing with the numbers, and the agreement is nowhere to be found. Your school board is being limited in its activities.

**Marie-Pierre Lavoie:** Exactly.

If the OLEP didn't exist, we would receive the same funding from the province. We are therefore lacking at least \$6 million a year, and that's been the case for years.

**Joël Godin:** This amount would put you on the same footing as second-language education.

**Marie-Pierre Lavoie:** If we received the provincial contribution, yes, that would be right.

**Joël Godin:** How much time do I have left, Mr. Chair?

**The Chair:** You have three seconds left.

**Joël Godin:** Thank you. In that case I'll wait for my next turn to speak.

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

Ms. Mingarelli, you have the floor for three minutes.

**Giovanna Mingarelli:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much to all the witnesses for being with us today. My questions will be for Ms. Lavoie and Ms. Bernier.

The Supreme Court of British Columbia declared that "majority school boards...must consider the importance of minority French-language education when the CSF asks them to transfer sites that are surplus...or under-utilized."

How do English school boards generally respond when you request the transfer of surplus or under-utilized sites?

**Marie-Pierre Lavoie:** It varies.

It should be noted, regarding the ruling you mentioned, that the Vancouver School Board was our opponent in that case. They react very poorly and really want to keep everything.

There are English school boards that absolutely want to keep their lands and sites. Indeed, it's not just about land, but about sites, including buildings.

However, there are other school boards that are happy to work with us. I'm thinking of the one in Burnaby, with whom we had excellent collaboration. We successfully acquired a site from that school board. As well, not so long ago, we held the groundbreaking ceremony for the construction of a school that we had been waiting for for a very long time.

The reaction varies from one place to another. In British Columbia, there are 59 English school boards and just one French school board. So, we handle it on a case-by-case basis.

**Giovanna Mingarelli:** Good; thank you.

My second question is directed particularly to you, Ms. Lavoie.

You stated that the Supreme Court of British Columbia gives a lot of leeway to the province to remain reactionary rather than proactively helping the CSF overcome challenges in finding sites and building schools as required by case law.

In your opinion, what measures should the province implement to move from a reactive approach to genuine proactive planning?

**Marie-Pierre Lavoie:** That's a hard question to answer.

I think we need to work better together. We need to come to an agreement with the province. The province needs to understand the needs of the Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique. We always keep repeating what makes us unique. We're the only school board that covers the entire province. There are places where there are no schools at all, even though there are rights holders' children. The province needs to understand—and needs to want to understand—our unique situation.

• (12:50)

**Giovanna Mingarelli:** Thank you very much,

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Mingarelli.

I now give the floor to Mr. Beaulieu for one minute and a half.

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

I find it outrageous to hear that. In Quebec, the funding granted to anglophone schools is higher than it should be, based on the proportion of English speakers. We're called racists because of Bill 101 by provincial governments that systematically underfund French schools after having tried to voluntarily assimilate francophones. It's a bit shocking. I apologize, it may not help you, but it might increase the pressure.

You talked about welcoming immigrants and mentioned that they should be informed about the existence of French schools. Would it not be more logical to try to direct French-speaking immigrants to places where there are French schools, without forcing them to do so, of course?

**Marie-Pierre Lavoie:** Indeed, we can't force them to do so, but we still need to talk to them and let them know that they exist. I think it's coming, progress is being made, but there's still a lot of work to be done in that respect.

**Mario Beaulieu:** I completely agree with you.

For the University of Moncton, do you find that francophone immigrants are systematically directed toward francophone universities? Are there any mechanisms that exist?

**The Chair:** I would ask you to respond very briefly, as there are only 10 seconds left.

**Denis Prud'homme:** Yes.

This year, we saw an increase in the number of permanent residents attending the University of Moncton. So that was a nice surprise for us.

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Godin for three minutes.

**Joël Godin:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

You stated that, according to the 2021 census, there are apparently 43,000 rights holders in British Columbia. However, you only serve 14% of them, so about 6,000 rights holders.

According to the law, services must be provided where the numbers justify it. Mathematically, such numbers justify it. Has there

really been no change in funding from the federal government or the provincial government?

**Marie-Pierre Lavoie:** No, there hasn't been any.

As you mentioned earlier, we still have to fight to be able to start offering programs in places where there are none. Currently, our board of directors is considering opening two programs, in Castlegar and Creston. We receive no funding from the province for the first year of a new program, as the funding formula is based on the previous year. Since this program did not exist last year, the students entering the system are not counted.

When anglophones want to open a new school, the students have already been counted, so they already have that funding.

**Joël Godin:** What I understand, Ms. Lavoie, is that you take a risk by launching a program, and you cover the funding for the first year.

**Marie-Pierre Lavoie:** Yes, that's right, at least during the first year.

**Joël Godin:** Yes, I understand.

You first asked that the federal government respect Part VII of the Official Languages Act in terms of funding granted for minority language education. It's one of your recommendations.

Are you claiming that the federal government isn't doing that work?

**Marie-Pierre Lavoie:** What we're asking for is greater accountability. We're requesting an increase to the OLEP. We're asking for more funding. It needs to be more transparent. We want to know why we receive \$6 million when immersion receives \$10 million.

**Joël Godin:** Compared to other provinces, we can see that your situation is different. So you don't have the same tools.

With its new Official Languages Act, has the federal government given itself the tools to enforce the measures, truly stop the decline of French and protect and promote both official languages?

**Marie-Pierre Lavoie:** We're still waiting for the regulations resulting from the modernization of the Official Languages Act.

**Joël Godin:** Indeed.

Secondly, you recommend that the government uphold its commitment to provide long-term funding for early childhood services. We know that early childhood is your incubator; it ensures that you have students who will follow the entire continuum of education in French.

Why do you have this fear?

**Marie-Pierre Lavoie:** Here again, the funding allocated to British Columbia for early childhood is not clear. I was here in 2018 and, at that time, I anticipated that we would need 2,600 early childhood spaces by now. However, a study by the Fédération des parents francophones de la Colombie-Britannique revealed that the need was actually for 8,000 spaces.

**Joël Godin:** If we took the census into account, we would be looking at 25,000.

**Marie-Pierre Lavoie:** Yes. There are 76,000 children. There are still nearly 23,000 children under the age of 5 who could access French-language child care services.

**Joël Godin:** Thank you for staying passionate and continuing your fight every day. I'm sending you all the energy you need to continue this fight. It's not normal for this to happen in British Columbia, and it shouldn't be the case anywhere else in Canada either. Thank you, Ms. Lavoie.

• (1255)

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Deschênes-Thériault for three minutes.

**Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The University of Moncton is a member of the Consortium national de formation en santé, a francophone organization funded by federal funds. Last summer, the Minister of Health announced \$78 million to improve access to health services within minority francophone communities, and I was very pleased to see that the University of Moncton would be among the beneficiaries of those investments.

How will these federal investments enhance the University of Moncton's capacity for training in health programs, at the Moncton campus, the Shippagan campus and the Edmundston campus, in my riding?

**Denis Prud'homme:** We are very happy to have this funding, as it has allowed us to increase our capacity in health programs. Among other things, we were able to increase the number of spots in medical training and nursing programs, and more specifically in the training of nurse practitioners.

These funds have also allowed us to improve our infrastructure, including our simulation labs, at our three campuses.

This funding is therefore very useful to us, as the usual grants would not have allowed us to increase the number of registrations and, thus, the number of graduates in health.

**Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault:** Thank you, Mr. Prud'homme.

I will now turn to Mr. Lang.

Earlier, we discussed the implementation of a comprehensive primary education program in northern New Brunswick. I would like to hear a little more about that from you.

What is the status of this? Is it something we could see happening soon?

**Mathieu Lang:** It will happen as quickly as the funding arrives.

In your first question, you mentioned investments in health, and I would say that something equivalent is needed for the field of education.

It is important to know that education is local. There are cultural differences from one place to another, whether it's the northwest of the province, where I come from, the northeast, or the south. You heard the representatives of the Société de l'Acadie du Nouveau-Brunswick speak, just before us, about the challenges in Fredericton, for example. We can also think about the situation in Saint John, New Brunswick. We need resources to understand the different situations. We just hired someone who specializes in multilingualism. However, if we create programs in the northwest and northeast of the province, we'll need teaching resources, not only to train teachers but also to conduct research.

Research is very important because other universities elsewhere in Canada don't do research focused on the situation in Rogersville, Edmundston or Campbellton. It is the University of Moncton that does that. However, it requires researchers and infrastructure. I'm thinking about the campuses in Edmundston and Shippagan, but especially the campus in Moncton, because it doesn't have the necessary technology to offer high-level and high-quality courses at the three campuses simultaneously, namely in a co-modal manner, to make the best use of resources.

So, yes, it can go quickly, but it will require serious support to make the necessary efforts to quickly train a sufficient number of competent teachers.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Deschênes-Thériault.

On behalf of the committee, I thank all the witnesses for being with us.

Colleagues, our next meeting will take place this Thursday. We will then begin our study on the use of French in government communications.

I would also note that the Minister responsible for Official Languages and the President of the Treasury Board have agreed to appear on December 4 concerning their mandate and priorities and the use of French in government communications. They will appear during the first hour of the meeting, and the officials will be able to stay for the second hour. I just wanted to inform the committee members.

The meeting is adjourned.





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