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Chair

The Honourable Denis Paradis

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• (0845)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Hon. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.)): Welcome everyone.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3), we will continue our study of access to early childhood services in the minority language. We are very happy to be with you, in Winnipeg, this morning.

First of all, we have some small technical issues to solve. We are missing equipment for the interpretation. I will ask my colleagues for unanimous consent to proceed without interpretation. Is that okay?

I don't hear anyone complaining, so it should be okay.

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): We are complaining, but it is not the committee's fault. We will therefore proceed this way; however, this is exceptional.

The Chair: It is exceptional, of course.

This morning, we welcome, as individuals, Dominique Arbez, professor and coordinator, Early Childhood Education, Université de Saint-Boniface, and Mélanie Cwikla, director, Technical and Professional Programs, Université de Saint-Boniface.

We welcome Carol-Guillaume Gagné and Peter Ormiston from the Association des parents fransaskois; Joanne Colliou from the Coalition francophone de la petite enfance du Manitoba; Alpha Barry and Hélène Grimard from the Conseil des écoles fransaskoises; Alain Laberge from the Division scolaire franco-manitobaine; Brigitte L'Heureux from the Fédération des parents du Manitoba; and Juliette Chabot, director of the daycare Les Chouettes de Lorette Inc.

I will explain how this meeting will work. You will each have five minutes, but, given that there's a good number of you, I would ask that you respect those five minutes, or else I will have to intervene and put an end to your presentation to allow everyone to speak. We want to hear from everyone. Do not get angry if I intervene. You will still be able to express your points of view during the second part of the meeting, during which members will each have six minutes to make comments or ask questions on your presentation. If you do not get the opportunity to finish your presentation, you can continue it by answering questions.

Is that okay? Yes? We will then start immediately with Ms. Arbez.

Ms. Arbez, you have the floor.

Ms. Dominique Arbez (Professor and coordinator, Early Childhood Education, Université de Saint-Boniface, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ladies and gentlemen, my name is Dominique Arbez. I am a professor and the coordinator of the Early Childhood Education program.

Personnel training is a key element to ensure the quality of early childhood services. In Manitoba, The Community Child Care Standards Act requires a ratio of trained personnel. The Early Childhood Education program of the Technical College at the Université de Saint-Boniface has existed for over 25 years now. This two-year training program leading to the ECE II classification is the only one to be offered in French in Manitoba.

Many of our graduates have become educators in nurseries, preschools, kindergartens and schools. Some of them manage educational daycare centres, others work for the government to ensure that daycare services are well coordinated. Some now teach this same program. It would be hard to measure the impact all these early childhood professionals have on our community, and to determine how many families and children have benefited from the fruit of their work.

We recommend implementing measures to re-enforce the recognition and the value of minority early childhood professionals, in order to help recruit and retain them.

We also recommend more support for networking and sharing opportunities among the various professionals, in order to give them the right tools and encourage their dedication.

In the classroom, we face many cultural and linguistic realities that we try to recognize and include in our teaching. This diversity brings some challenges in the mastery of both official languages. Our required practical internships in French- and English-speaking environments have led to new criteria for language courses. These restrictions, although necessary, have contributed to a drop in enrolment.

We recommend the provision of funds to provide additional preparatory courses for potential students in post-secondary education in both official languages.

We also recommend putting aside funds to recruit potential students, as well as to develop and offer online courses to ensure access to training.

Since we have implemented our second method of receiving a diploma, the accelerated program allows us to provide training to students who have acquired work experience, therefore making it easier to fulfill the personnel ratios as mandated by the Act. Despite the utility of this method of receiving a diploma, we had to significantly modify the offer this year, following a decrease in the amount of available teaching positions. Consequently, our program is the only one that simultaneously offers courses to both groups—those in year 1 and year 2—which has allowed this model to survive.

This is why we recommend that the provincial government guarantee stable funding, despite the limited number of candidates for this training model.

The Advanced Diploma in Leadership in Early Childhood Education is designed for early childhood managers, and was launched in 2008. Unfortunately, it did not receive regular funding. The program was suspended, and, alas, it is no longer possible to receive advanced training in early childhood in French in Manitoba. The Bachelor of Arts-Developmental Studies at the University of Winnipeg, with which we have signed an articulation agreement, recognizes our diploma as the equivalent of 30 credits. For at least five years now, we have been trying to get a similar agreement with the Université de Saint-Boniface. However, even if the discussions are moving forward, the agreement will not be recognized by the province under the ECE III classification.

We recommend that the provincial government provide clear instructions and adequate funding to develop and offer advanced training in early childhood in French.

Unlike us, the other public post-secondary institutions in Manitoba have one or more educational daycare centres that can benefit from collaborative agreements. These agreements give students in early childhood exceptional internship or shadowing opportunities. This is a major obstacle for the francophone community, specifically for families who could benefit from this high-quality centre.

We recommend that the federal and provincial governments approve funding dedicated to implementing a high-quality educational daycare centre on campus, which could serve as an educational model.

We know that the universities and the colleges could contribute to the creation of new knowledge by researching early childhood.

• (0850)

A golden opportunity is being missed with the decision not to move forward with the Centre d'excellence enfant, famille et communauté day care centre. The centre would have facilitated research on early childhood development in minority communities.

We are calling on the federal government to make a larger investment in research on early childhood development in minority communities.

It is clear that French-language early childhood programs in Manitoba are not on equal footing with English-language programs. We therefore ask the committee to support our request for adequate funding for early childhood training in French.

Thank you for listening.

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

We will continue with Mélanie Cwikla.

Ms. Mélanie Cwikla (Director, Technical and Professional Programs, Université Saint-Boniface, As an Individual): Good morning. My name is Mélanie Cwikla, and I am the director of the Université de Saint-Boniface's École technique et professionnelle, which is responsible for the university's technical and professional programs.

Members of the committee, welcome to our province, Manitoba.

During your brief visit, you will have an opportunity to see just how strong and proud Manitoba's francophone community is, in the heart of the Americas. That said, our community's vitality is far from certain, making better access to early childhood services in French essential.

As my colleague Ms. Arbez mentioned, the early childhood education program we offer at Université de Saint-Boniface has more than its share of challenges. We face numerous obstacles. There is no denying that, in order to provide access to quality early childhood services, day care spaces are, of course, needed, but so are trained educators. It comes down to creating a strong foundation for the continuum of education in French, from birth to professional life.

Our French-language programs have a dual mandate: train experts in early childhood development as well as experts in language transmission. Even though no anglophone institution has such a mandate, our training programs are often assessed based on the same performance criteria, in other words, the number of students we serve and the cost per student. Little to no recognition is given to our dual mandate or the fact that our recruitment pool is significantly smaller than that of our anglophone counterparts.

In order to support access to early childhood services in minority language communities, the federal government should ensure that a portion of the funds transferred to the provinces goes to post-secondary training in French. This would help francophone institutions provide comparable training to that of their anglophone counterparts.

As my colleague indicated earlier, our training program for educators, which includes job placements, continues to suffer from a lack of sustainable funding. Every year, we are forced to apply for funding yet again. How can we ensure the program's survival under those conditions? What's more, our advanced leadership program was suspended because of insufficient funding. What does that mean? It means that no French-language training is available to educators who want to become day care centre directors. In addition, anglophone colleges are able to offer advanced training programs that focus on children with special needs. At the Université de Saint-Boniface and École technique et professionnelle, we are barely able to keep our core programs going. Francophone children have the same needs as their anglophone counterparts, and our day care centres are desperate for qualified staff. I do not say that lightly; 11 of 21 licensed francophone day care centres had to ask the province for an exemption because they did not have enough trained staff. There is indeed a desperate need.

The shortage of trained staff is likely due to numerous factors, but I will focus on two of them—pay and working conditions. Red River College conducted a survey of its 2015-16 graduates. It revealed that they earned an average of \$34,732 a year. After \$8,000 in tuition fees and two years of study, graduates earn the same thing as someone who completed a five-month certificate program to become a personal care attendant for just \$2,400.

When you consider the working conditions, I think you would agree that being an early childhood educator is something of a calling. The working conditions in minority communities are certainly difficult. Like their anglophone counterparts, francophone educators have to ensure children are well prepared to start school, but French-language school. They, too, have a dual mandate to fulfill: early childhood development and language transmission. Some of them eventually throw in the towel and leave the field. The federal government can help by adopting a holistic approach that recognizes the importance of the profession.

Yes, day care spaces are needed, but it's important not to disregard educator training, both in terms of basic skills and ongoing education. Children are our greatest asset, and the vitality of our communities depends on them. We need to have the means to match our ambitions.

Others have analyzed the issue, but I think it's now time to take action and make an investment in early childhood development, one that is needs-based. It's important to research early childhood development in minority communities. Special funding should be made available to support research by francophone institutions in minority communities. This would pave the way for universities and colleges to work with francophone communities to conduct research, documenting the positive impact of early childhood investments on the vitality of francophone minority communities.

The more evidence we have, the better-equipped we will be to make the right decisions. That is just as true for us, the institutions and communities, as it is for you, the governments.

• (0855)

We believe we have a role to play in the access to quality child care services, and we hope that the federal government recognizes this role by supporting post-secondary early childhood education training in French. This involves helping us to contribute to the continuum of education in French, from birth to career.

In closing, if the committee would like to broaden its consideration, I invite it to look at the application of section 23 of the Charter with regard to education continuum from early childhood to the post-secondary level.

Thank you.

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

We'll now move on to Mr. Gagné and Mr. Ormiston.

Mr. Carol-Guillaume Gagné (Chief Executive Officer, Saskatchewan, Association des parents francsaskois): My name is Carol-Guillaume Gagné, and I am the chief executive officer of the Association des parents francsaskois. We are used to operating with limited resources. I will let the vice-president give the presentation. If there's time, I will add some information. Ultimately, I think it's

important to hear the voice of the parents. In fact, without the parents, culture can't be passed on.

Mr. Peter Ormiston (Vice-president, Saskatchewan, Association des parents francsaskois): Members of the committee, ladies and gentlemen, good morning. Thank you for inviting us to this meeting.

Before I start this presentation, I would like to thank all our partners, especially the representatives from the Conseil des écoles francsaskoises, the CEF, who are here today and who helped us to put together our presentation. I would also like to thank the committee members for giving us their attention.

We would like to talk to you about a part of the reality experienced by the early childhood sector in our Franco-Saskatchewanian community. Multiple challenges affect early childhood services in Saskatchewan. We need only think of the needs of newcomers and exogamous families, who make up a growing proportion of the Franco-Saskatchewanian community; the considerable distances separating our Franco-Saskatchewanian communities; and disparities in services offered in urban centres and rural areas. I could go on.

Established service providers, including early childhood centres, ECCs, family and child support centres, or FCSCs, pre-kindergarten and home child care, are required to explore innovative approaches to address these challenges. As you know, Part VII of the Official Languages Act states that the government is committed to taking positive measures for official language minority communities. This implies that all partners in this community must be involved, in accordance with their mandate, to support the community's development.

Can you imagine just how important it is to support early childhood in our minority communities?

It's important to remember that a waiting list in early childhood services is equivalent to a loss of clientele, not only for ECCs, but also for our schools in Saskatchewan. Finally, it is the community as a whole that loses vitality.

The statistics clearly show that the risks of assimilation are still very real. Language proficiency is the most effective way to counteract assimilation. In October 2016, the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages published a report stating that the later children start learning a language, the less likely they are to master it. This confirms what many studies have reported, namely that the critical period for language acquisition is early childhood, from zero to four years of age.

In that same report, the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages made clear some dark realities that contribute to this assimilation. It says that, in francophone minority communities, early childhood development is hampered by a lack of resources, a shortage of staff in early childhood centres and a fragmentation of services.

In Saskatchewan, services for young children are funded by the provincial Ministry of Education. For us francophones in a minority situation, such a universal approach that does not take into account our particularities, our actual situation and our specific challenges can in no way adequately meet our needs.

Early childhood services must therefore be part of a continuum, from birth to the end of a child's studies. In order to respond adequately to the needs of children and their parents, many partners need to work together, with an approach that favours the exchange of services and information, all in a climate of trust and true partnership.

• (0900)

As you can imagine, it isn't always easy to establish constructive partnerships in a context of financial scarcity. It's clear—

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Ormiston. I have to end your presentation, but you will be able to complete your explanations later when you respond to questions or observations from members of Parliament.

We now go to Ms. Colliou.

Ms. Joanne Colliou (Manager, Centre de la petite enfance et de la famille, Coalition francophone de la petite enfance du Manitoba): Good morning.

I am here as a representative of the Coalition francophone de la petite enfance du Manitoba, a coalition of partners that provides programs and services to families of children aged zero to six. We are not responsible for child care centres, but rather for supporting parents. The steering committee of the coalition is composed of the Division scolaire franco-manitobaine, the Fédération des parents du Manitoba and the Société de la francophonie Manitoba. There are also round tables where all of our provincial partners can sit to deliver programs and services to families. One of the coalition's major projects is the early childhood and family centres, the ECFCs, which are resource centres for parents. There are 16 ECFCs in Manitoba. Five of them are in urban areas, the others are in rural areas.

We currently receive funding for 11 of these 16 ECFCs. We had to stretch the funding. We are applying for grants in a number of places to meet the needs, because the communities have asked us. We recommend that the federal government give us money so that we can continue our project. Five school communities are still waiting for an ECFC. There is a lack of funds, and families are clamouring for an ECFC in their community. The remaining five communities are also the communities that are a little further away from the urban area and have more needs than many others.

We also have a staff shortage. We want our ECFC staff to have a level two early childhood education, to start with, because we also provide support to parents. We would also like to increase the hours of work for these coordinators, who work 20 to 30 hours a week, depending on the region. A region that has a coordinator working only 20 hours a week can't offer as many programs and services as another. We recommend receiving funding to improve this. Also, we can't offer pension or benefit plans to our staff. For the last six years, salary increases have been non-existent. The funding we receive has been stable since 2009 with no cost of living increases, among others. Everything increases, except funding.

We also have a good problem. The ECFCs attract families to the school division, which increases the number of students. This means that, at the moment, there is a lack of space in the schools for

ECFCs, although the school division is trying to support us as much as possible.

There is also a serious lack of programming for exogamous families, since the bulk of our users come from exogamous families. We only have a small number of programs for this clientele. We must improve that too.

Finally, there is a great lack of funding for early childhood assessment and research. We have had ECFCs in francophone school communities in the province since 2004, and we know that our programs have a great qualitative effect. Yet research doesn't show it. We have a lot of data that we could use to complete the research, to prove that it is important to invest in early childhood and that we should continue to do so.

Thank you.

• (0905)

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

We'll now move on to Alpha Barry and Hélène Grimard, who will both be presenting.

We'll hear from you first, Mr. Barry.

Mr. Alpha Barry (Chair, Conseil des écoles fransaskoises): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Members of Parliament, ladies and gentlemen, on behalf of the entire Franco-Saskatchewanian school community, allow me to convey our best wishes.

I sincerely thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak on behalf of the Conseil des écoles fransaskoises, known in brief as the CEFSK.

Our presence here is motivated by a strong desire to see the Official Languages Act modernized, especially with respect to early childhood education in a minority situation. We have a brief, and it has already been translated into both official languages. The title is "Help! The Franco-Saskatchewanian community is at the mercy of assimilative policies of the Government of Saskatchewan and Parliament is missing the call".

Therefore, the CEFSK would like to take this opportunity to share with you the pressing challenges that it is currently facing in early childhood education. These challenges must be tackled.

The first part of the brief that we are presenting today deals with the legislative framework for early childhood education in Saskatchewan. The second part covers the challenges that the CEFSK is faced with in early childhood education. Lastly, the third part of our brief contains a proposal for amending the Official Languages Act.

In short, it is critically important that federal funding for the Franco-Saskatchewanian community be used effectively to fill the gaps created by the legislative structure adopted by the Province of Saskatchewan. It is with this in mind that we are today emphasizing the paramount importance of modernizing the Official Languages Act.

Ms. Hélène Grimard (Vice-Chair, Conseil des écoles francas-koises): The importance of the early childhood period for intellectual, emotional and identity development no doubt no longer needs to be demonstrated. As your committee is well aware, the early childhood period is even more fundamental for the francophone and Acadian minority communities. The Franco-Saskatchewanian community is facing one of the highest rates of assimilation in the country and linguistic exogamy is constantly growing. Also, the chronic underfunding of the CEF does not allow it to boost the number of places it offers for pre-kindergarten.

We are very pleased that the current federal government seems more receptive. We would like to point out that the 2017 Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care is a great initiative, but let's be realistic: it has a seven-year term, and the bilateral agreements for implementing it will expire three years after they are adopted. Still, taking into account the interests of our communities during the implementation of these instruments depends on a lenient political will of our government towards us, which, let's be frank, is rather rare. There is a big gap between the early childhood programs offered to the majority and those offered to the minority. This is unacceptable, and it contributes to the assimilation of the province. This is why intervention by the federal government is critical. It must ensure the promotion of French-language communities in Saskatchewan, and at least partially bridge the gap between our communities and the English-speaking majority in Saskatchewan.

The gaps identified on several occasions by minority francophone school boards and by this committee require structuring solutions that go beyond the adoption of another protocol, a roadmap or a multilateral framework. Providing protections for early childhood education in the Official Languages Act would be a permanent solution to these problems.

Your current study is the perfect opportunity to recommend legislative changes, which could then permanently remedy the problems of the CEF in the field of early childhood education.

The CEF thanks you for giving it the opportunity to present its concerns and solutions.

Thank you.

• (0910)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Barry and Ms. Grimard.

We'll now go to Alain Laberge.

Mr. Alain Laberge (Director General, Division scolaire franco-manitobaine): Thank you very much.

You've received a folder in the colours of the Division scolaire franco-manitobaine, the DSFM. It's our brief, which is a little lengthier than I can present to you right now. We didn't want to draw things out for nothing.

Mr. Chair and committee members, the DSFM thanks you for being here. It is a privilege to host you in the land of Louis Riel, and I invite you to visit his grave and our schools if you have time this afternoon.

As this committee has noted time and again, early learning is the foundation of the education continuum. It is a crucial stage in life,

particularly with regard to language and identity development in children.

Despite the consensus on the importance of that period in child development, particularly in minority situations, the solutions identified by the federal government have not provided a lasting solution to the problem of access to early learning services in French.

This committee is once again studying the issue. That is excellent. The DSFM urges you to use this latest in a string of studies on the subject as an opportunity to recommend to the government permanent solutions. The DSFM asks that the obligations of the federal government be strengthened so as to ensure that the Government of Manitoba can no longer use federal funds under an agreement such as the Multilateral Framework without identifying and responding to the needs of the DSFM.

It is not sufficient for the DSFM and the Franco-Manitoban community to receive part of the federal funds for early learning in proportion to their populations. The fair share is the amount that provides for substantive equality.

The solution is simple: Parliament must limit the discretion of federal institutions to allow the Province of Manitoba to do what it likes with the federal funds. Confer rights upon the communities through the Official Languages Act.

I want to state that the Government of Manitoba recognizes the importance of early childhood education, both in the Public Schools Act and in its budget. That said, the DSFM continues to be concerned about the place accorded to the needs of the Franco-Manitoban community in relation to that of the majority.

The DSFM's experience in the area of early learning is positive, but many challenges remain. Since at least 2012, the establishment of full-time pre-kindergarten programs for four-year-olds in all DSFM schools has been one of its priorities. However, not all DSFM schools have adequate spaces—or even any spaces at all—to accommodate such a program.

In January 2014, the DSFM launched a pilot project to create a full-time pre-kindergarten program. Today, the DSFM offers this pilot program at five of its schools.

The DSFM has collected preliminary data on the results of students enrolled in the program, and particularly their progress in DSFM schools. Using the 2014-15 cohort at École Gabrielle-Roy, which is now in grade 2, the level of francization of the students enrolled in the four-year-old program was significantly higher than that of students who started school in kindergarten at age five. Please consult table one, which is at the end of the lengthy brief.

The DSFM has found that, unless they have learning difficulties, students who started school at the age of four no longer require transition phase support by grade 1.

Although the Manitoba government recognizes the importance of pre-kindergarten programs for four-year-olds, the DSFM uses its operational budget to fund the pre-kindergarten programs it offers in its five schools, as well as the spaces it leases from organizations.

One of the greatest challenges for the DSFM, apart from the lack of funding for pre-kindergarten for four-year-olds, is the competition of the nursery programs offered in English-language schools. This competition puts the DSFM at a disadvantage, and it loses students to the schools of the majority that are closer and offer a pre-kindergarten program for four-year-olds, thanks to federal funds.

To ensure that federal funding granted to the minority in the area of early learning truly goes to the initiatives chosen by the DSFM and has a real impact on the success of our students, the obligations of the federal government must be strengthened.

As an example, we can look at the agreement signed in December 2017 that does not meet the needs of the Franco-Manitoban community. In fact, the DSFM is concerned about the language clauses as they do not impose sufficient obligations on Manitoba. In its news release, available in English only, the Government of Manitoba also describes its objectives for the funds from the agreement, without mentioning the specific needs of the Franco-Manitoban community or the DSFM. Let's remember that the Department of Employment and Social Development can change this in three years, when the agreement is renegotiated.

For this reason, the DSFM is using this opportunity to propose a permanent solution to the problems in the area of early childhood education, namely the amendment of the Official Languages Act. The DSFM is of course grateful that a clause dedicated to the needs of the Franco-Manitoban community was included in the agreement, but in reality, this is not a reason for celebration because the francophone community has a right to expect federal institutions to include such clauses systematically. I am sure you will agree that women should not be grateful to receive the same wages as men.

•(0915)

In closing, I am not a legal expert, much less a parliamentarian, but in my humble opinion, there is no need to try to stop the world from turning or to change the country's Constitution. What is needed is to amend the Official Languages Act. This would be a permanent, structural contribution that would be certain to promote the development of French here in Manitoba.

The Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages is studying the question of the modernization of the act. The DSFM hopes you will do the same.

Thank you very much.

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

We will now give the floor to Brigitte L'Heureux from the Fédération des parents du Manitoba.

Ms. Brigitte L'Heureux (Managing Director, Fédération des parents du Manitoba): Good morning, members of Parliament and members of the Standing Committee on Official Languages. Welcome to Winnipeg.

I would first like to thank you for the invitation and for giving me the opportunity to appear on behalf of the Fédération des parents du Manitoba, or FPM, and to provide recommendations to the federal government on early childhood in minority contexts.

The FPM is an organization with a mandate to promote education in French by offering programs, workshops, services, resources and educational materials to children from zero to 12 years of age, to preschool and school groups, to early childhood educators, in-home and in-centre French-language educational child care services, boards of directors of French-language educational child care services, school committees and other parent groups.

We promote the importance of the parent's role as a primary educator in the educational journey and development of their children, regardless of whether they choose to stay at home or use an educational child care service in a centre or at home.

Given the reality of today's families and the large number of exogamous couples, our approaches are inclusive so that all parents, including English-speaking parents, are aware that they have a positive influence on the choice of language for their children.

As a parent organization, our challenges are many. We lack human resources to accomplish everything we would like to; we can't pay our staff adequately, which makes it difficult to recruit and retain qualified staff; we face high rental and operating costs; and on and on.

The FPM's vision is quite simply "For the love of our children and our language". It's really the passion for our cause that spurs us on every day.

We benefit tremendously from networking and sharing projects with other minority parent organizations across the country, under the auspices and leadership of the Commission nationale des parents francophones, the CNPF. For our organizations, sharing projects and good moves is essential. The more we can develop pan-Canadian projects in early childhood, the better our communities will be served.

I recommend that the federal government increase core funding for early childhood organizations, including parents organizations, so that they can hire and retain qualified staff; enhance the quality of programming and services offered to parents and children; continue the important work of raising awareness of the importance of French-language education from early childhood; develop effective communication mechanisms to attract and retain families entitled to our services and those offered by the community; support exogamous families; contribute to the vitality of the community; and close the funding gap with the inflation rate.

I recommend that the federal government give priority to the intermediary approach by and for communities offered by organizations such as the CNPF. This approach allows us to maximize federal investments to develop pan-Canadian projects based on best practices and successes in other provinces, to share our knowledge, expertise and challenges facing our minority communities and to make the voices of parents heard at the provincial and national levels.

We can't talk about the challenges of early childhood without mentioning the desperate need for spaces in French-language educational child care: about 800 children are on waiting lists for a place in French-language educational child care in our province. The bilateral agreement has just been signed, and we are pleased that the provincial government plans to fund 250 francophone spaces over the next three years, but this funding alone does not meet all our needs.

Given the importance of the early childhood period for the vitality of all communities and, at the individual level, the importance of early childhood for learning the French language, building identity and developing the feeling of community membership, I recommend that the Canadian government invest more in high quality, equitable, accessible and affordable educational child care; that early childhood, given its importance, be taken into account in the next Action Plan for Official Languages; that the importance of preschool education in the educational process be considered in the application of section 23 and that it may enjoy constitutional guarantees.

Thank you very much.

• (0920)

The Chair: Thank you very much for your presentation, Ms. L'Heureux. I would especially like to thank you for helping us to plan today's meeting.

The next speaker is Ms. Chabot from Les Chouettes de Lorette Inc.

Ms. Chabot, the floor is yours.

Ms. Juliette Chabot (Director, Les Chouettes de Lorette inc.): Good morning, everyone.

Thank you for inviting me to speak to you about what is happening in child care services.

My name is Juliette Chabot. I am the director of a child care centre, Les Chouettes de Lorette, which is in Lorette, Manitoba. Lorette is a small community where there are many francophones, and it is really nice to work in such an environment.

Our centre is attached to the École Lagimodière, which is part of the DSFM. We have a baby corner, which is very small—with only four spaces—spaces for preschoolers and others for school-aged children. We have an effective partnership with the school, and we feel well supported in providing French-language services in our centre.

Since we are attached to a French school, we always try to recruit francophone families first. Our clientele is often made up of exogamous families. Therefore, we have several little ones whose mother tongue is English. We must work very closely with these children so that they learn as much French as possible before they enter school, given the limited resources available to us.

Like any other centre, we also have to manage waiting lists. We are the only centre in Lorette offering services in French. A few years ago, we asked the government for funding to expand our centre, which was approved. However, the government has suspended our project.

When we have to provide special services to a child, these services are not always in French. In fact, instead of putting the child on a waiting list and delaying our assistance, most of the time we use English-speaking specialists to provide such services.

As for the staff, we must always recruit francophones to work in the child care service, which is honestly very difficult for us. Again, we work in partnership with the Université de Saint-Boniface, which sends us students on internships. It's a great way for us to recruit well-trained staff.

Since salaries are very low, it is a big challenge to recruit qualified staff. We must rely entirely on our partnerships with DSFM, the FPM, the Coalition francophone de la petite enfance du Manitoba and Université de Saint-Boniface. There are not enough resources to provide child care services in French.

We, too, hope to get more help from both the federal and provincial governments.

Thank you.

• (0925)

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

We'll start with the questions and comments period. I would ask MPs to introduce themselves, and say who they are and where they're from so that our friends across the way can recognize them

We'll start right away with Mrs. Boucher.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): My name is Sylvie Boucher, and I am a member for the Quebec region, specifically the riding of Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix. I'm a Conservative MP. To be honest, I am the only Conservative woman in Quebec.

From 2006 to 2008, I was the Parliamentary Secretary for Official Languages. From 2008 to 2011, until I lost my election because of the "orange wave", I was Parliamentary Secretary for the Status of Women. You know that we represent several political parties, but this committee is one of the few that doesn't play politics. It's very rare. I often take jabs at other MPs, but it's always jokingly. I'm saying it before others do. Language isn't a question of political affiliation, but of identity and deep roots.

This trip has been very eye-opening for me. I am shocked to see that in 2018, we still have to fight for language. I read a lot of things—and here I'm not going to play politics, but be political—including bilateral agreements in several provinces. For example, on February 23, my colleague Mr. Vandal announced the signing of a \$47 million agreement representing 1,400 new child care spaces for Manitoba. Funds have been allocated to Manitoba.

What proportion of these funds will go to the francophone community?

My question is for any of the witnesses. Anyone may respond.

Ms. Dominique Arbez: There are 250 spots out of 1,400 in child care that have been reserved for francophones. But, I think we need to provide some context. Since we, francophones, had major catch-up to do, the shortage we had to deal with was greater than that of anglophones. This is what the centralized waiting list indicated. So we can speak about a slight catching up.

However, it should also be noted that approximately half of the 1,400 child care spaces were already promised. These existing places were not funded. The new funding is therefore intended for half of the 1,400 spots. Of the 250 spaces, some are already existing.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Okay, thank you.

On page 8 of 13 of your brief entitled *À l'aide! La communauté fransaskoise est à la merci de politiques assimilatrices du gouvernement de la Saskatchewan et le Parlement manque à l'appel*, I was startled by something in point 24.

Roughly translated, it says the following:

What is more, the Saskatchewan government funded the creation of 889 English-language preschool spaces, including 810 spaces in 18 new community schools in Saskatoon, Regina, Warman, and Martensville. No funding was provided to Saskatchewan's francophone community.

Do you know why?

For my part, I am from Canada, specifically from Quebec, and I know the MPs from that province. We all speak French. Those who speak English get funny looks.

I do not really know the local MPs, so I have to ask you, are there any French-speaking MPs in your province who could help you?

This might not seem important to you, but we give a lot of money to the provinces.

Are there members of Saskatchewan's legislative assembly who speak French, as we do, who can help the francophonie and can also help you communicate with us?

● (0930)

Mr. Alpha Barry: Thank you for your question, Ms. Boucher.

I will try to be as diplomatic as possible.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: That is not necessary.

Mr. Alpha Barry: You can understand that, even if a francophone elected official is not able to bring a bill to a vote, it will be picked up in the newspapers. Personally, I have not yet read an article about a member who says he is a francophone, attends happy hour, and defends the cause.

Let me give you some background. As to the number of daycare spaces, twenty or so new schools have been built in the province, fairly strategically. I can tell you that these schools are like five-star hotels. The only thing they are missing is an Olympic-size pool. These schools are built in new communities or new subdivisions. Who buys those new houses? Young families.

We are talking about the availability and accessibility of schools and services, but the only francophone school is in the south end of the city. Take me as an example. I am a parent first and then the chair of the school board. I have three young children. We live in the north end of the city in a new subdivision. We have to cross the whole city

to reach the only francophone school, which is in the south end, and that is also where the only francophone daycare is. I can tell you it is a sacrifice. Our travelling time is over an hour. By the time we get the children home, we hardly have any time to do all kinds of other things for them. The school is the means, the avenue for preserving our language and culture.

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

We will now move on to Mr. Dan Vandal.

Mr. Vandal, please go ahead.

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

Welcome, everyone. I think most of you know me. I am Daniel Vandal, the member for Saint-Boniface—Saint-Vital and this is my first term in office. I served as city councillor for a long time and hail from Louis Riel country, in Saint-Boniface. I hope we will have the opportunity to visit that site this afternoon.

First, congratulations on the work you do in your communities. It is very important work and I have a lot of respect for it. We held consultations last year about the new strategic plan that was announced, and the roadmap was one of the key issues for our communities. I commend you for your work.

In terms of early childhood, do you mean children up to the age of 7, 8, or 9?

A voice: Up to the age of 5.

Mr. Dan Vandal: We were in Vancouver and Edmonton and heard a lot of different numbers.

For children up to the age of 5, how many spaces are occupied right now in Manitoba? Does anyone have that information?

A voice: I think it is about 600.

● (0935)

The Chair: May I remind you that you absolutely must use the microphone in order for the answers to be recorded.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Here are my two questions: how many spaces are occupied in Manitoba right now and how many people are on the waiting list?

Ms. Brigitte L'Heureux: There are currently between 500 and 600 children enrolled in educational daycare at the province's 21 centres. I contacted all the centres in July 2017 and we had about 800 names on the waiting list, and all the spaces were taken. Many of the requests come from the Saint-Boniface neighbourhood, in Winnipeg, but there are also some from Saint-Vital and St. James. There are a lot of requests from the rest of the province.

Mr. Dan Vandal: There are only 500 or 600 spaces occupied? That's all?

Ms. Brigitte L'Heureux: Yes.

Mr. Dan Vandal: And there are 800 names on the waiting list. Is that correct?

Ms. Brigitte L'Heureux: That's right.

Mr. Dan Vandal: What proportion of those on the waiting list live in rural areas as opposed to urban areas? Did you mention that with regard to the waiting list?

Ms. Brigitte L'Heureux: I don't have it with me right now, so I cannot answer.

Mr. Dan Vandal: That's fine.

My other questions are for Ms. Arbez and Ms. Cwikla, who presented a lot of information.

To summarize, Ms. Arbez and Ms. Cwikla, let me ask you the following. What is your greatest challenge and your main recommendation for this committee to submit to the House of Commons?

Ms. Mélanie Cwikla: Our main challenges are funding and recruitment.

First, it is hard to recruit students—it is a very female profession—because the tuition is \$8,000 and the students have to invest two years of their life to earn close to minimum wage once they get their degree, perhaps a bit more if they are lucky. So recruitment is difficult. Promoting the profession is difficult.

Funding for the training programs is also a challenge. The funding comes from the province. For our regular program, we have multi-year funding. Since 2013, we have also had a workplace training program, but the funding is per cohort only. So every year we have to submit a new application to the provincial government to fund our spaces. Last year, for the cohort that started in September 2016, we received the funding in April 2017. This year, we have still not received our funding, and the end of the fiscal year is approaching.

We have to take a leap of faith, offer the program, and be willing to do so without funding. It is tough. We do not have...

Mr. Dan Vandal: Pardon me, but I do not have much time left.

What is your main recommendation to the committee?

Ms. Mélanie Cwikla: My recommendation is to direct funding to post-secondary training and to make the provinces accountable to the federal government for that investment.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Thank you very much.

Mr. Laberge, you said that, in the field of early childhood and probably in other fields as well, the Franco-Manitoban community should not receive just part of federal funding on a per capita basis, but its fair share.

Do you have specific examples of the community not receiving its fair share?

Mr. Alain Laberge: In the case of daycare centres, federal funding goes directly to English-language programs. In our opinion, that is discrimination. That money should help subsidize our preschool program for four-year-olds. That is a glaring example in our view, because we know full well that if children start at one school at the age of four, they will continue at that school.

In certain neighbourhoods, many francophones are offered a space for their four-year-old child at a daycare in an English-language school, so the child will then continue on at that school. The child will not switch to the French-language system later on.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Vandal. We are in Winnipeg today so I want to commend you for the work you do, Mr. Vandal.

There are a number of MPs in Ottawa who are francophones from outside Quebec and who do excellent work for the francophonie. That deserves to be recognized. Two of them are with us today, Darrell Samson, from Nova Scotia, and René Arseneault, from New Brunswick. In their respective ridings, these MPs face situations similar to the ones you are telling us about.

Congratulations to you, Mr. Vandal, and to all of you for the work you do.

Mr. Gagné, would you like to say something quickly?

• (0940)

Mr. Carol-Guillaume Gagné: Yes. I noticed that the last questions pertained to Winnipeg. I know we are in Winnipeg, but the situation in Saskatchewan also warrants consideration. Either we officially invite you to visit Saskatchewan so we can lay it out for you, or we take a bit more time today to present our own figures. It is up to you.

The Chair: Very well. Thank you very much.

We will move on to Mr. Choquette.

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you very much.

I am François Choquette, the MP for Drummond, Quebec. I am the NDP critic for official languages and vice-chair of the Standing Committee on Official Languages. I am a French teacher by training, so I am familiar with the field of education.

You talked about the great importance of early childhood in fighting assimilation. I am disappointed to hear that Saskatchewan has the highest rate of assimilation. So I support your idea of meeting in Saskatoon and Regina. We apologize for not being able to stop there. We also apologize to the francophones of the North; we have not been able to go to the three territories either.

I will be quick because we do not have much time.

My first question is for Mr. Laberge and Mr. Barry.

You said there are bilateral agreements between the federal and provincial governments that include linguistic clauses. You also said, however, that those agreements have limitations. You said they might not be the answer in terms of long-term funding, respect for linguistic duality, and equity, and that they might not guarantee that francophone communities receive their fair share.

Can each of you elaborate on those thoughts please?

Mr. Alpha Barry: Thank you very much to our Franco-Manitoban friends.

I would like to get back to the main reason we submitted a brief that includes a solution. The solution does not involve clauses. I know our Liberal friends are very proud of their linguistic clauses, and I congratulate them on that and am very grateful, but that does not solve the problem. What we need is a federal act that includes protection and guarantees respect for legislation, the philosophy and the ultimate purpose of section 23 of the charter. Right now, we are at the mercy of politicians. In politics, if a party wants to be re-elected, it has to look after the majority, not the minority. Education in minority communities, which is guaranteed by a constitutional right, is everyone's business.

Personally, I reject the argument that education is under provincial jurisdiction while, on the other hand, the constitution establishes rights, privileges, and an obligation to manage all aspects of language and culture. We might be at the mercy of an anglophone official who does not take part in the community's activities or whose children do not attend French-language schools. Yet it is that person who tells me how to spend the funding allocated to me. It is a joke. To my mind, it is like Nivaquine, a little tablet against malaria: the pill is so bitter that you can't swallow it.

Our schools are grappling with cultural disengagement. We have an outdated school, in the very south end of the city. It has a capacity of 300, but it currently has about 480 students. It no longer has a library because we had to use that space for classrooms. Next year, we expect to have more than 500 students. It is so bad that the students have to line up to use the washroom. It is ridiculous.

Clauses and rules are really not what we need. We need protection that is included in an act in order to recognize the need to consult and to provide accountability. If you send us money, you have to live up to your obligations to us.

We also have to remember that school boards are tired of dragging provincial governments to court. The Official Languages Act can be challenged in court. At some point, we have to see what we can do instead of just whining about it.

I don't know if I have answered your question.

● (0945)

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you very much, Mr. Barry.

Unfortunately, time is running out.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will now turn to Mr. Laberge. You have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Alain Laberge: Perfect.

I would like to add to what Mr. Barry said earlier. I think the problem in Manitoba is something we see right across the country.

I am fortunate to chair the *Regroupement national des directions générales de l'éducation au Canada*, a national association of school boards. All the provinces have the same problem. You went to British Columbia, and I imagine you heard the same challenges. It is the same thing in Alberta. You will hear the same thing from east to west.

We talked about the Official Languages Act earlier. This act also needs to be given some teeth so it can be enforced and to provide for

recourse. Right now, little recourse is available. Should we have recourse to the courts to enforce this act? Strengthening the act is basic, in our opinion.

Second, subsections 23(2) and 23(3) of the charter must be recognized by giving francophones greater recognition in the census. That would provide for a larger francophonie and allow French-language schools to grow. Right now, we have to fight the provincial ministries for recognition of rights holders in locations where we do not have any schools. Yet the solution is simple for anglophones. A new subdivision is built. When children and families move in, an English-language school is built. Those children are probably the children of rights holders, but they will go to an English-language school. So we are losing out there.

The third thing is federal spaces. The federal government gives us money to build daycare centres in our schools or to build spaces. The number of students is rising steadily, but the province gives us minimal infrastructure, that is, a very small school. In most cases, in all the provinces where French-language schools have been built, they were overcrowded even before they opened. What goes by the wayside? It is the daycare centre. There is growth in daycare centres, but we cannot give them any more space in our schools. Where do those children go then? They end up in English-language daycare centres, in anglophone communities, and then make anglophone friends at English-language schools.

The Official Languages Act has to be given some teeth.

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

We will now move on to Mr. Samson.

Are you ready, Mr. Samson?

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): I am always ready.

Thank you very much for being here today. We really have a full range of guests.

First, I'd like to introduce myself, even if most of the witnesses know me.

My name is Darrell Samson, and I have been a member of Parliament since 2015. However, my career was in education and so I know the communities, the day cares, the post-secondary institutions, the parents' federations, and the school boards. Before being elected, I was the director general of the only French-language school board in Nova Scotia.

I congratulate you on your commitment and I commend your passion. What is interesting, when you are in a minority situation, is that you must work together much more than others. There is an expression I often use, which is that we have to go to bed later and get up earlier in order to move things forward. I thank you very, very much for your work. There is also another expression I could use: the more you do, the more you see what remains to be done. That's problematic.

The evolution of the situation is interesting. There are some successes, but there is also some wasted time; we are losing some of the children while we wait for French services.

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms was enacted in 1982, and its section 23 has helped things progress. Around 1990, some French-language school boards were created, which was a huge turning point. Then French-language services started being offered in all of the provinces, with the exception of British Columbia. Yesterday, Nova Scotia announced that the provincial Acadian school board . In my opinion, this is going to change the world. As you have said all morning, this touches on the notion of symmetry and asymmetry and that is where the problem lies.

I have several quick questions for you. I know I've gone on a bit, but some context was necessary.

You spoke about agreements on a language clause. I'll tell you the truth: we have worked hard, and it is not easy to obtain a language clause, because the public servants tell us that does not fall under their jurisdiction. We know that this clause does not go far enough and that we have to make a change to provide greater protection, as it was well explained earlier. We have to amend the Official Languages Act very soon. Certain provinces give more than others, and the challenges are enormous, as you have explained very well.

I am going to try to ask my questions very quickly.

The Official Languages Education Program provides additional funds to improve education in the language of the minority. Would it not be beneficial to also provide additional funds to improve the early childhood French-language services?

The question is addressed to the representatives of both school boards.

● (0950)

Mr. Alain Laberge: Personally, I think we have to begin by understanding where the OLEP money is going; that would be very important. Barely three months ago, we lost an assistant deputy minister position, in education, which was funded by the federal government. We had been promised that position specifically to move things forward in education, but it was abolished. Where did that money go? We have no idea. We just lost \$100,000 or \$125,000. In every province, we have no idea where the OLEP money's going. A percentage of that money is intended for us, but we have no idea how it is being spent.

You asked whether funding should be granted for early childhood French-language services. Yes, we totally agree. That should be the case everywhere in Canada, as a minimum.

Mr. Darrell Samson: That is good because the OLEP aims to enrich the language. It is delivered by the community and for the community, to a certain extent. The money has to reach you. If you had that for early childhood services, that would be ideal.

I am going to move on to something else since my time is passing quickly, but that is very important.

Each province has a lieutenant-governor who represents the Governor General, who represents the Prime Minister of Canada and the government. Perhaps we would need a lieutenant in each province who would ensure that the funds allocated to the provinces for official language minorities arrive at their intended destination, and also that all of the agreements between the federal level and the provinces, not only regarding education, include a guarantee that the

funds get directly to the field. That would be key, according to what I understand. There is food for thought here.

We don't have much time, but can you tell us about the strategic agreement signed by the Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones and the federal government? That would be one further step toward a solution. Could we hear from the representatives of both councils on this point?

Mr. Alain Laberge: It is a good thing that the FNCSF entered into this partnership. However, it does not solve all of the problems, since the Canadian Council of Ministers of Education also has a say in the allocation of federal funds. So everything has to be in context.

If the FNCSF is called on and can take part in discussions, we will know more about how the funds will be distributed from one province to the next. At this time, as you said earlier, some provinces receive 30%, 40% or 50% of the funds, but we've no idea where the money goes.

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

Mr. Arseneault has the floor.

Could you introduce yourself for the witnesses.

● (0955)

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

My name is René Arseneault and I am a proud Acadian from New Brunswick and minority community francophone. I am somewhat lucky because I live in a rather homogeneous region, and the population there is mostly French-speaking. I had the good fortune in my life of knowing several Franco-Manitobans. When I was studying law in Moncton, several Franco-Manitobans were students in that law faculty. I'm thinking, for instance, of Christine Robidoux, the Chartier brothers, Allain Laurencelles and many others in my area of Saint-Boniface, as well as of the people in the francophone villages to the south. There was one in particular whose name escapes me. There were also a few French-speaking Saskatchewanians; Lise Lorain is one young woman I remember well.

I mention this because my questions may be legal in nature. There are other lawyers here. In fact, the first judge from the first cohort of the Moncton University Law Faculty in the beginning of the 1980s, was from Saint-Boniface. That is Mr. Chartier. There is a quite active and present legal community here.

Ms. Cwikla, earlier you were the first to speak of including rights in the act or of amending section 23 of the Charter. Have you read the briefs submitted by the community here on that topic?

Ms. Mélanie Cwikla: I did not exactly refer to including them in the Constitution or to amending it, but I said that we should ask ourselves whether, given its current form, access to education in the language of the minority applies to the entire education continuum.

To my knowledge, there are no briefs. The only thing I read on this is an article by Mr. Giroux from northern Ontario who spoke about the implicit guarantee of access to post-secondary training in the context of the Constitution. However, if we francophones are to benefit from section 23, they have to have French as a mother tongue.

Mr. René Arseneault: As all of you know, section 23 refers to primary and secondary education, but not to preschool or to post-secondary education. So we would need to ensure that the entire education spectrum is included by providing French-language services from early childhood to post-secondary education, inclusively. Have I understood you correctly?

Ms. Mélanie Cwikla: There would also have to be support for court challenges. It costs money to go and fight for your rights at the Supreme Court. If the government can provide funds to the communities so that they can fight these legal battles, I am sure some will want to wage those battles.

Mr. René Arseneault: Yes, there are a lot of experts in that area.

The provinces have already gotten involved in several legal contests. The problem is that these battles last 10, 12 years. Even if you win, it then takes that many years again to convince the government to act, particularly in education.

I have a question for the Franco-Saskatchewanian community. In fact, this applies to all of the provinces aside from Quebec. Canada is a big place, the western provinces are immense, and the French-speaking population is dispersed north to south. We went to British Columbia, then Alberta, and we are now here, in Winnipeg. We did not go to Saskatchewan, but you are here to tell us about it. We know our geography. What is the cruel choice we must make to ensure that the rights of the critical mass of francophones are respected? Where do we draw the line regarding services offered, and federal and provincial government funding? How do we make this cruel decision and how do we set limits?

Mr. Gagné, you may answer.

Mr. Alpha Barry: While Mr. Gagné gets ready, I could answer you.

The solution is very simple, Mr. Arseneault; these are services provided by the community for the community, and the people who do the work have to have a certain zeal, some protection, and some legitimacy. That is what we are proposing; we need to be protected by a provision in a federal act. When something is enshrined in law, it can no longer be changed through administrative means. It proceeds from Parliament, and it becomes public.

When we have the opportunity to present the challenges our communities face and propose solutions, and when we have the means to do that...

Mr. René Arseneault: I'll interrupt you, because I would like to hear your definition of a Saskatchewan francophone community. How many French-speaking residents have to live there to be able to say that this is a community that needs a day care and a primary school?

I'm placing myself in the shoes of the minister or public servant in Ottawa who is going to have to make a decision. I'm thinking of section 23 of the Charter, which says "wherever [...] the number of children is sufficient to warrant" it.

•(1000)

Mr. Alpha Barry: Let's take the Franco-Saskatchewanian community as an example. That community is made up of people who live in the French culture on a daily basis, define themselves as

francophones, want to live in French and worry about the vitality and permanence of their group. That is a francophone community.

There are francophiles. There are also immersion programs. I always say that immersion programs exist because francophones exist.

Mr. René Arseneault: Do you have any suggestions that would help us ensure that the federal funds allocated to early childhood or education make it to their intended destinations? We need to know how the funds are managed and administered, if we want to be able to look at data, do calculations and quantify the results. Would you have any potential solutions to suggest in that regard?

Mr. Alpha Barry: We need a law. It's simple: we need a law.

Mr. René Arseneault: Yes, but would a law allow us to track funds allocated by Ottawa right up until they are disbursed to a community such as Gravelbourg?

Mr. Alpha Barry: Let's start with a law that would specify the modalities of accountability, roles and responsibilities. When that law is in place, we can institute an accountability process. This could be done by Canadian Heritage, by an administrative tribunal or by other parties. The lieutenant-governors could see to it. The solutions are many, but we are not there yet.

You must remember that when funds are destined for communities to maintain their vitality, there is a public servant somewhere who decides how that money will be spent. In most cases, that does not meet the needs of the community. That is a problem.

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

We will conclude with Mrs. Boucher.

You have three minutes.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Good morning.

We have been talking a lot about the new Official Languages Act. These days, much is being said about equality between men and women. In the same vein, could it not be possible to have a law that would be strong enough to establish equality between anglophones and francophones? It could be that simple.

Has anyone ever contacted you to ask you to be part of the solution and to contribute to the drafting of a new Official Languages Act? I am referring to all of the francophones, those who are here, but also those in some western regions we visited recently as well as those in the communities to the east. You are the ones who know your own reality best.

Mr. Carol-Guillaume Gagné: That is a good question.

This gives me an opportunity to speak, finally; I am pleased. That's it, you won't have a choice, now you are going to have to come visit us.

That said, we were not really consulted on this, but we don't necessarily have to look at things from that angle. We aren't all playing by the same rules. In certain regions, we do not have a critical mass of francophones.

We need quality services. As we were saying earlier, for our communities to be vibrant, we have to be able to experience and appreciate the culture, and it is often the peripheral organizations that instill life into the culture. For our families to be interested in taking part in these activities, we have to offer them activities that are equal in quality to the ones offered to the majority. We have to remember that 70% of our families are exogamous. In that way, they are already a part of the majority, and they participate a lot in majority activities. They are not going to go to activities they consider less valid or less interesting.

However, funding cultural activities of equal quality is expensive. It represents a lot of work. It may come to that. Otherwise, in 15 or 20 years, we will still be discussing the situation.

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

This brings our meeting with you this morning to a close. I thank you very much for the contribution you are making to society. On behalf of the members of our committee, we thank you very much for your volunteer work and all of the work that you do.

Before adjourning the meeting, I want to ask you to stay in your spots for a bit, and I will ask the members to stand behind you, so that we can take a group photograph.

The meeting is suspended, and we will resume momentarily with a new group of witnesses.

●(1005) _____ (Pause) _____

●(1030)

The Chair: Pursuant to standing order 108(3), we are resuming our study on French and English as a second language programs.

Today we have the pleasure of having Mr. Derrek Bentley, who will be speaking as an individual, Mr. Jeff Anderson, who is the principal of École Guyot, Mr. Ron Cadez, who is the principal of École Howden, and Ms. Sandra Drzystek, liaison officer, French as a second language, Manitoba Education and Training.

I want to welcome all of you.

This is how we are going to proceed. Everyone will have around five minutes to deliver their presentation. We will then have a question and comments period with the members of the committee. The six-minute interventions are for comments or questions and answers. So, those are the rules of the game.

We will begin immediately, with Mr. Bentley.

●(1035)

Mr. Derrek Bentley (As an Individual): Thank you very much for today's invitation.

I'm going to speak about my own experience. I learned French in an immersion program, and I was for some time, in high school, in a French-language school as a non-rights holder. I did my post-secondary studies in English. I never had the opportunity to speak French at home.

Now, I sit on the national board of directors of Canadian Parents for French. I am also president of the Manitoba Conseil jeunesse provincial, and the Manitoba representative at the Fédération de la jeunesse canadienne-française.

This experience-rich life has brought me before you today to speak about French as a second language programs.

Today, my identity is just as francophone as anglophone, it not more so, but how is that possible since I only ever spoke English at home?

The francophonie as we know it has changed a great deal since several laws about it were brought in. More and more is being said about French-speaking youth, rather than identifying people with labels like francophone and francophile. There is more and more talk about linguistic security. These small changes in terminology have a big impact on how we choose to see the world.

However, these societal changes must be reflected in laws and policies. The perspective on official languages in Canada has to be made to evolve. It's as though for a long time, there was a hierarchy in the francophonie, and there were people who were more francophone than others, and some less so. In that hierarchy, "old stock" francophones, those whose mother tongue is French, are often placed at the highest level; those who are bilingual, and for whom French is a second language, are somewhere in the middle, and those who are still learning French are even lower than that.

We have to deconstruct that artificial hierarchy. The government's laws, structures and policies must encourage and create a Canadian francophonie where we all have the opportunity to learn and live in French.

First, there is a crying need to redefine what the francophonie is in the eyes of the government, for the purpose of broadening that definition and including a lot more people. Indeed, everyone who speaks French should have access to French services, which is not always the case. We have to work on normalizing French everywhere for the purpose of creating a truly bilingual Canada.

Secondly, all French-language services have to be planned so that there is enough space in the infrastructure, and there should be a sufficient number of qualified educators to teach the language to all of those who want to learn it. Learning French has changed my life. I am involved and engaged all over the place in French, even though it is not my first language. I find it very difficult to think that other young people across the country don't have that opportunity. Imagine my life if my mother had lost the lottery that gave me a spot in French immersion. Where would I be today? I would certainly not be here before you. The French as a second language programs across the country need to be quality programs, and they should be offered equitably to all those who want them. In my opinion, bilingualism is a part of the social contract which is bedrock in Canada. I would even go so far as to say that learning French and English in school should be a right for all Canadian students.

Third, still on the subject of education, there have to be more options and French-language post-secondary institutions. I should not be forced to study in English after high school because of a lack of access to French-language programs. The creation of these institutions will take time, but in the meantime, it would be a good thing to offer bursaries to cover the very high costs due to the fact that students cannot stay in their region and must move. It would help a lot to enable those who want to pursue post-secondary studies in the language of their choice.

Fourth, French needs to be more than a language that is simply spoken in school, even for youngsters who study French as a second language. We have to do better at promoting a rich and diverse francophonie, and celebrate its diversity, its cultures and its accents everywhere in Canada. I am talking about linguistic security. We have to promote a Canadian francophonie that is broader than ever. We have to value accents and different ways of speaking French by creating space, and a Canada where we feel comfortable speaking French the way we speak it.

Finally, we have to create more inclusive environments by funding projects that allow French-speaking Canadians to innovate and discuss things in French, and this includes French-speaking youth whose French is a second language. Those projects are essential, particularly for youth, and they must be created by young people, for young people. Youth know what other young people need. It could be cooking in French, playing soccer in French, or holding debates in French. French has to be the medium and not the end. And most of all, we have to have trust, and provide resources to the organizations that know how to implement those projects.

• (1040)

Organizations such as Conseil jeunesse provincial and Canadian Parents for French contribute to the solution through their programs but lack the resources to extend their reach as far as possible. We hear a lot about language security for native French speakers, but for people who speak French as a second language, an additional layer of complexity comes into play. At the end of the day, people become bilingual and gain confidence in their skills by using the language in multiple areas of their life.

If you take away anything from my presentation, I hope it's the realization that Canada's francophone community in 2018 looks a lot different than it used to, having changed tremendously over the past few years. Our legislation and policies have to keep pace to better reflect that evolving community. I dream of a Canada where the use of French is considered normal, where we can speak French anywhere, and where we can be served in French without even having to ask. I wholeheartedly believe we can make that dream come true if we work together.

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

We will now hear from Mr. Anderson.

Mr. Jeff Anderson (Principal, École Guyot, Louis Riel School Division): I'd like to thank the committee members for the opportunity to be here today.

My opening statement will focus more on me, personally. I won't be speaking to the major issues that others have addressed so well.

I'm from an English-only-speaking family in southwestern Ontario. We ran a small dairy farm near Sarnia, which had not a single francophone. From grades 3 to 8, I took 20 minutes of core French a day and, then, in high school as well, from grades 9 to 11. This learning was fundamentally important in my life, changing it forever. These French as a second language classes inspired me, instilling in me a love of the French language. I can remember the teacher showing us pictures of young children enjoying the winter carnival in Quebec City and skating on the Rideau Canal. She told us that the children in the pictures spoke French, which seemed odd to

us, since we didn't know anyone who spoke French. Even our teacher was an anglophone.

After grade 11, I spent a year in Casablanca, Morocco, as an exchange student. I attended a French lycée there. After that amazing year, I completed grade 13 back home, in southwestern Ontario.

I then did my university studies in French. I earned a bachelor's degree in science at the University of Ottawa, some 700 kilometres from home. I chose the University of Ottawa because of its bilingual program, which allowed me to study science in French. You could call it a very late French immersion program.

After completing my bachelor's degree at the University of Ottawa, I did a master in science. I then obtained a bachelor of education from Laurentian University, in Sudbury, which is also a long way from my home in Sarnia. The schools in my area did not offer any French-language programs at the time.

After all that, I moved to Manitoba, where I began my career. I have been involved in the province's immersion programming for 22 years now and have been with the Louis Riel School Division for 18 years.

When I was a teacher, I taught physics, natural science, and mathematics at the high school and junior high school levels. As a curriculum consultant at the Bureau de l'éducation française, I helped design natural science curriculum for K-12 students. I have been a principal for 13 years, all of that time spent at immersion-only schools.

In addition, I have a master's degree in school administration from Collège universitaire de Saint-Boniface.

Despite growing up in an English-only-speaking family, I earned three of my four university degrees in French.

I care deeply about French-language education, not just on a professional level, but also on a personal one. I have four sons between the ages of 12 and 18. We raise them in both languages, and they have all attended or currently attend DSFM schools.

Thank you very much for this opportunity.

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

Next, we will hear from Mr. Cadez.

Mr. Ron Cadez (Principal, Louis Riel School Division, École Howden): Good morning.

Thank you for inviting me to be here today.

This morning, I have the pleasure of telling you about my experience in immersion schools. I am the principal of École Howden, part of the Louis Riel School Division, here, in Winnipeg. Throughout my 24-year career, I have worked as a teacher and administrator in immersion schools at every level, kindergarten through grade 12. For 10 years, I taught music to elementary and high school students. For three years, I was the vice-principal at Collège Béliveau, a school for students in grades 7 to 12. For the past 11 years, I have been a principal, first, at École Provencher, a K-8 school, and, then, at École Howden, a K-6 school. I'm very proud to be a member of our school division's team. The Louis Riel School Division is considered a leader in the province when it comes to immersion programming, so I'm very fortunate to have had the opportunity to work and learn in an environment where both of Canada's official languages are so highly valued.

I was not bilingual when I began my career. In fact, I thought my French education had come to an end when I took my last core French class in grade 12 or when I dropped my French class in my first year at the University of Toronto because I was so lost after three months. All that to say I didn't learn French as a young child or in school; rather, I learned French as a teacher working in an immersion school. It was not until I learned French as a teacher that I realized for the first time the program's true power. From the early days of my career, as I watched my students succeed and their language proficiency improve, I eventually came to recognize the program's potential, so much so that I chose an immersion school for my own children.

The success of my students shaped how I look at learning as an educator in an immersion school. For instance, I firmly believe that immersion programs should not be viewed as elitist. They are for all students. I believe that just about every student can achieve success, regardless of what subject they are studying or whether they are in an immersion or English-language program. That said, in order for students to derive the maximum benefit from being in an immersion program, certain conditions need to be in place.

In doing research for my master of education thesis, at the University of Lethbridge, I explored those conditions. I was trying to pinpoint the reasons why some students would switch from the immersion program to the English-language program when they started high school. I learned that the enrolment and retention rates of the immersion schools in the Louis Riel School Division were among the highest in the country. I determined that the model our schools use and our focus on a French-only environment from kindergarten to grade 12 are factors that greatly contributed to the success of our schools. The French-only model for all levels, especially high school, is very rare in Manitoba and around the country.

I also believe that a French-language learning environment is essential in order for students to reach their full potential. Obviously, I'm a big believer in the work I do and the potential of our immersion schools.

I appreciate the opportunity to contribute to this important discussion. I look forward to answering your questions and sharing my views.

Thank you.

●(1045)

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

We will now go to Ms. Drzystek.

Ms. Sandra Drzystek (Liaison Officer, French as a Second Language, Manitoba Education and Training): Good morning, everyone.

I am very happy to be here today. I could tell you about my personal background, but I would rather talk to you about the Manitoba context and the work I do at Manitoba Education and Training.

I learned French through core French classes, as others here have done. I was a French teacher in a program in English and a teacher in a French immersion program. I was also a divisional consultant in a school division for the French component as well as for other languages, including English as a second language, Spanish and German.

I will speak to you in both official languages, because I think we need spaces where it is possible to communicate in both languages. So I will take the liberty of speaking in both French and English.

[*English*]

My current position, which I've held for 11 years, is that of liaison officer for French as a second language. It involves understanding and addressing challenges in French as a second language in Manitoba and supporting school divisions and other partners in improving the state of French as a second language in our province.

I'm dedicated to this because I have a personal experience, and I see it in our children every day. What resonates with me here is that for so many people it's about the journey. It's almost a miracle that some of our kids stay till the end of grade 12 and maybe continue on in their studies, because what I hear from many people is that our students don't necessarily have a legitimate place in Canadian society as bilinguals or plurilinguals. That may not be very comfortable for you to hear, but that's the reality.

Some of the biggest challenges we face are with confidence—confidence in language competencies—and that goes for our students as well as our teachers.

I'd like to speak about French in the English program and also about French immersion. In terms of French in the English program in Manitoba, all of our school divisions offer these courses from K to 12. It's not mandated provincially; however, most school divisions mandate it.

Most teachers are generalists. They may or may not have a certain competency in French. There's little or no training for them when they go through the faculty of education. This is a huge concern. Provincially, we offer much professional development and much learning, but these teachers don't necessarily see themselves as language teachers. They teach all the subjects every day, from K to 8. Perhaps the high school teachers are specialists; I was, but most teachers aren't.

What happens, then, is that students have limited exposure from K to 8, and what they do have isn't great. After five, six, or seven years of French in French class, most students leave with almost no competency in communicative skills in French. What does that result in? It results in huge reductions in enrolment in the high schools. We have such small numbers of high school students who actually continue to grade 12 that it's shocking.

When I was in school way back when, many students continued on in grade 12. Some of us here around this table are those students. That is less prevalent in society now, and that concerns me greatly, because the big thing we think we need to pay attention to is that most of our students in Manitoba will only have access to French language education through that format. They account for 31% of our Manitoba students that are in the program, whereas French immersion, which I will speak to next, accounts for 13% of our population.

Coming now to French immersion, I think similar things are also true. We sell the story and we sell the dream, but do we actually realize that dream in a real way?

•(1050)

The Chair: Thank you, Sandra. We'll have to go to the next round, which will be questions from and comments by the members of the committee.

[*Translation*]

Members of the committee have six minutes to ask questions and make comments.

We will begin with Sylvie Boucher, who will introduce herself first.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Good morning.

My name is Sylvie Boucher and I am a member of the greater Quebec City area, specifically the riding of Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix. I was parliamentary secretary for official languages for a year and a half and then parliamentary secretary for the status of women. Since 2006, I have been fighting hard for the French language, even though I am a Quebecker myself.

Today, I must say that, as I'm listening to you, I find it interesting that you, as unilingual anglophones, have been drawn to our language. Mr. Bentley and Mr. Anderson, you talked a lot about your personal experience, but what made you want to speak French? You were from a unilingual English family, and today, you are fighting to make people understand that you can be both bilingual—anglophone and francophone—and live in French.

Can you tell me what attracted you to French and why you have chosen this cause today?

Mr. Derrek Bentley: In my case, my parents enrolled me in an immersion school simply because, at home, in our community, the school that offered that program was seen as a good school. So that's how it started, without my being involved and almost by chance.

When I was in elementary school, everyone around me spoke French. I thought that all young people spoke French and that it was normal. When I came to high school, I studied in a dual-track school for about six months and realized that, in that school, only one-third

of the kids spoke French and two-thirds spoke only English. That's when my world changed. That's why I chose a school where the first language was French, and now, I think I already had this feeling that it was normal, from a young age.

In my mind, I can really see a Canada where it's normal for young people and adults across Canada to learn French and English and to be able to speak one or the other language anywhere. So I think it comes from this experience of suddenly realizing that it's not normal to speak only one language and to want other young people to have experiences like the ones I had at school.

•(1055)

Mr. Jeff Anderson: Personally, I think it's really the teachers who have awakened that passion in me. If I had had teachers who were not passionate, I would never have become one. So that certainly made a big difference for me. Teachers are also the ones who helped me understand that it was possible to use the French language elsewhere. So in grade 11, I spent a week in Ottawa at the Forum for Young Canadians. It was so exciting. It was wonderful to hear so many people speak French.

We also travelled to Ottawa, Montreal and Quebec City in grade 8. It also allowed me to explore an entirely different culture. It was fascinating for me. So, if teachers had not organized those trips and opened the door to those possibilities, I would have never discovered it.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: You just said something that has struck me.

We are talking about Manitoba. We have travelled all the way here to the west to realize that your province or the western provinces are reluctant to recognize the French fact. And yet, you just said yourself that learning both languages has opened the world to you.

In other meetings, we also talked at length about revising the Official Languages Act because it has not been revised in 50 years. If you had a suggestion to make here in the committee, what would be the first thing you would like us to do for you to advance the French fact?

Ms. Sandra Drzystek: I have only one suggestion: to give students more opportunities to live in French, to create federal programs that would allow students to have opportunities—not just in high school, but from kindergarten to grade 12—to live in French with native speakers. That means they would have a francophone friend somewhere, a personal connection with the language. This is what's missing; they do not have this connection, this opportunity to learn French outside of school.

Activities outside school is the key to personal connections. School trips, exchanges like those offered by the Society for Educational Visits and Exchanges in Canada (SEVEC) make all the difference. We must recognize that there is a space for people who are multilingual or bilingual. They are not Quebeckers, they are not Franco-Manitoban and never will be. They are bilingual, they have another identity; we must really support that identity and create the space for them.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mrs. Boucher.

Dan Vandal will be the next speaker, but just as an introduction, I would like to congratulate Mr. Vandal—and I did the same earlier, with the first panel of witnesses—on his excellent work for the francophonie in the region.

You know, in Ottawa, many of our members are francophone and come from outside Quebec. It's really surprising. Today, three of them are here: in addition to Mr. Vandal, we have Darrell Samson from Nova Scotia, and René Arseneault from New Brunswick. There is a significant francophone presence in Parliament, in Ottawa.

Congratulations on the work that you do for your region, Mr. Vandal.

You have the floor, Mr. Vandal.

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

We are pleased to welcome all our witnesses today. The two schools in question, École Guyot and École Howden, are located in Windsor Park and Southdale, respectively, in my riding of Saint Boniface—Saint Vital. Congratulations. Keep up the good work that you do for our language and our community.

My first question is for Ms. Drzystek.

I'm trying to understand the difference between all the programs in our school system. We have the French-as-a-second-language program and the immersion program. When my kids were smaller, there was even the 50-50 program. I think it was at the École Provencher.

What is the difference between the French-as-a-second-language program and the immersion program?

• (1100)

Ms. Sandra Drzystek: The concept of French as a second language is what was previously called basic French. It's part of the English program in Manitoba. Normally, students have 30 to 45 minutes of French classes per day, and in high school, 110 hours of French classes. It's only a language course, while in immersion, all school subjects are taught in French.

The challenge in Manitoba is that there are not enough teachers for all the subjects, such as physical education or music. There may also not be enough teaching consultants, special needs teachers or guidance counsellors. That's where we are seeing a shortage of staff. The federal budget provides money for teacher training, an area where there is a gap.

Mr. Dan Vandal: I know that École Provencher offered a 50-50 program at one time. Is that still the case?

Mr. Ron Cadez: No. I was the principal of École Provencher when the program was cancelled. The program changed over the years, and toward the end it was no longer a program for francophones. The initial idea was to provide francophones with the opportunity to learn some English. Some subjects, such as math and science, were taught in English, and the rest of the program was in French. In our view, the program had become a diluted version of the immersion program towards the end. Anglophones enrolled in the program to learn some French and some English. It went against our school division's philosophy behind the immersion program.

That's when we decided to move from a 50-50 program at École Provencher to an immersion program.

Ms. Sandra Drzystek: In Manitoba, the Division scolaire franco-manitobaine has French as a first language. Instead of having a 50-50 program for francophones, rights holders pursue a French program and they have the choice of being in a French immersion program. It's really two French-as-a-second-language systems, the basic French program and the immersion program.

Mr. Dan Vandal: I'm quite familiar with the DSFM. As is the case for Mr. Bentley, my youngest graduated from a DSFM school.

I have heard a bit about an elitist immersion program. Can the two principals talk about it briefly?

Mr. Jeff Anderson: Yes.

Ms. Drzystek alluded to the fact that some school divisions may not call upon bilingual specialists, special needs teachers or guidance counsellors. In many school divisions, the immersion program is offered in dual-track schools, that is, there are two programs within the same school.

Parents often have a misperception. They feel that, if their child is having difficulty with the immersion program, it is because of the language. As administrators, our job is to make them aware of research showing that changing programs is not the answer to learning difficulties.

We are very well supported in our school division with the immersion program. Francophone special needs teachers, guidance counsellors, psychologists and social workers can help the children attending our immersion school. It is important. Research shows that, when they can receive adequate support, children with learning disabilities may be successful in the immersion program. But debunking a myth is not always easy.

• (1105)

Mr. Ron Cadez: I would like to add to my colleague's comments.

It seems to me that one of the frequent reactions to students experiencing difficulties is to suggest a transfer, as Mr. Anderson said. Parents are not always the ones who consider this possibility. The teachers are often the ones proposing it. My research has shown that this was a common approach. Even now, this is one of the first recommendations from outside psychologists who are assessing children in difficulty and who are not really familiar with our program. We are convinced that the recommendation is not desirable.

Ms. Drzystek mentioned that 13% of students in the province were immersion students. Last night, there were 30 families in my school, but there were only 14 in the neighbouring anglophone school. About half of the families in our neighbourhood have children who are enrolled in our immersion program. This is a good representation of the population. We must meet all the needs and we work hard to do so.

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

We will continue with Mr. Choquette.

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you all for being here today. Your presentations are very interesting and your experiences are truly inspiring.

My name is François Choquette and I represent the riding of Drummond. The city of Drummondville is well known for its poutine, of course. You can try it if you ever go there, although it is not very healthy. I am a French teacher by profession. So I admire what you do. Finally, as a member of the NDP, I am currently vice-chair of the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

We went to British Columbia and learned that French as a second language courses were not mandatory. Many school boards have decided not to offer them. There is no French immersion program or French-as-a-second-language course. This is a gap.

As I understand it, in Manitoba, the province or the department does not make the teaching of French as a second language compulsory, but virtually every school or school board provides it.

What is the reality? Do all children have the opportunity to do French immersion? My understanding is that about 13% of anglophones in Manitoba have access to French immersion.

Do all the others have access to French-as-a-second-language courses?

Ms. Sandra Drzystek: In Manitoba, we use the term “school division”. All Manitoba school divisions offer French classes. Normally, they are compulsory from grade four to grade eight. They are always optional at the secondary level. Some school divisions offer French classes from kindergarten to grade three. There are 37 school divisions in Manitoba, and 23 of them offer French immersion and French-as-a-second-language courses.

Mr. François Choquette: If I understand correctly, it's mandatory up to the level equivalent to the second year of high school in Quebec.

Ms. Sandra Drzystek: Yes.

Mr. François Choquette: So we are talking about grade eight. It is optional afterwards. Students can then take courses in Spanish, Arabic, Mandarin, computer science or any other subject, I suppose.

You made recommendations about the French immersion program because it is perceived as being somewhat elitist. You already talked about it. We hear the same criticism everywhere. In the west, people have said that the program is elitist, that it is the luck of the draw that determines whether you get a place, and so on.

What recommendation do you have for schools that offer an immersion program as opposed to French-as-a-second-language courses?

Mr. Ron Cadez: Can you clarify your question?

Mr. François Choquette: As I understand it, 13% of students have access to French immersion programs.

Is that correct?

Mr. Ron Cadez: No, that is the percentage of students across the province who choose French immersion programs. In our school board, 50% of new registrations go into immersion programs.

•(1110)

Ms. Sandra Drzystek: In 23 school divisions, all students who are interested in French immersion programs can register for them. We have the spaces we need. Some divisions do not offer French immersion, but 23 of the 37 school divisions do. The real figure is that 13% of all students are registered in the program. The difference is between the cities, the rural areas and the north. Whatever the situation, students have access to the program.

Mr. François Choquette: That is very important because, in British Columbia, students wanting to go into immersion cannot do so because there is no room. Here in Manitoba, that is not a problem.

Mr. Ron Cadez: No, it is not a problem. All students can register in an immersion program in their neighbourhood schools, if one is offered there. There is no lottery, or anything like that here.

Mr. François Choquette: That distinction is important to understand. The dynamics are not the same. So what would your major challenge be? Is it the quality of the teachers in the French immersion or French as a second language programs?

We have often heard that some students have gone through the entire program and spoken no more French at the end.

You talked about the need to have direct contacts, as with the student exchange programs operated by the Society for Educational Visits and Exchanges in Canada, or SEVEC, but do you have reasonably good-quality teachers?

Mr. Jeff Anderson: The quality of the teachers is quite good. We are very lucky here in Manitoba. The Université de Saint-Boniface offers education programs at bachelor's and master's level. So we have excellent access to professional development in French.

One of the current challenges is that the demand for teachers who can work in French exceeds the capacity of the program at the Université de Saint-Boniface to train them. So we are sometimes forced to hire other people whose French may be a little rusty. That often happens in isolated, rural areas, or when a position has to be filled in February, for example, when there are not a lot of people available on the market. Sometimes, situations like that can arise.

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

Mr. Samson, you have the floor.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you very much.

My name is Darrell Samson. I am the only Acadian member of Parliament from Nova Scotia in Ottawa. That is a privilege. However, every privilege comes with a responsibility. I have to make sure that I contribute in francophone matters for the entire province. That was also my responsibility as the former executive director of all French schools in Nova Scotia, a position that I held for 11 years before I was elected.

My career in education lasted 30 years. At the beginning, I was responsible for core French and immersion in an English-language school board. There were no French-language school boards at that time. I even brought immersion teachers and core French teachers together so that they could start to talk to each other. It was not just the immersion classes that were considered elitist, the teachers were also. So I am offering you a little window into the future. The immersion teachers said that core French was not their problem, that they did not teach those taking it, that theirs was very difficult work and that they really had to be actors, much as you described. Even the core French teachers considered themselves inferior. I forced them into it, nicely, but successfully. The union was not happy, but they learned to live with it. Those who were qualified could teach immersion courses, but they also had to teach two core French courses, and vice versa. So those who were teaching core French also had to teach two immersion courses. That changed everything because the teachers began to talk to each other. The immersion teachers really needed core French teachers so that they could learn how to teach core French, because the approach is completely different.

None of that is my objective today.

My first reaction to your presentation can be summed up in one word: “impressive”! You have told us about your journey as anglophones and about the place you have reached today. I think you should make videos together. They would be shown all over Canada and the minister would be happy. It would also serve to put more value on immersion.

Mr. Cadez, you talked about research and you are so right. In Nova Scotia, there was a myth about French schools. Parents did not want to register their kids in a completely French school, a school with only French, because they were afraid that their children would lose their English. They were afraid that they would not be able to go to university in English or work in English. Research shows the contrary, of course. Today, moreover, not only do francophone students succeed very well in French but, in the same exams, they succeed better in English than the anglophone students. It is interesting.

You told us about another extremely interesting myth and again, you were perfectly right. You said that, if children are having difficulty, the parents think of sending them to an anglophone school. As you said, research clearly shows that children obtain much the same results in one language or another, once they possess the skills of the languages in question. It will be the same for children with learning difficulties. The worst thing about it was that the teachers were pushing the families to do so.

I am now going to ask you some quick questions, because you have gone through all this. Which positive changes have taken place over the last 20 years? What do you see on the horizon that could be improved?

• (1115)

Mr. Derrek Bentley: In Manitoba, there’s a good program called “French for Life. There are also posters all over town, on the buses and on benches. I feel that there has been a great change over the last 20 years. French is promoted to everyone as a living language. It is being done not only to the kids who have learned French at home but

also to the kids learning it at school. In my opinion, that is why there is an increase in the demand and the registrations for immersion programs.

I feel that it will continue in the future. My dream is that all young people will learn French and English, that every kid will be bilingual. So there could be businesses all over the place where people would speak to me in French without my even asking whether or not the service is available in French. That is my dream. I feel that the way to make it come true is through education at school, but also, informally, through projects such as the Jeux de la francophonie canadienne and the Parlement jeunesse pancanadien.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Cadez.

Mr. Ron Cadez: I work in the same school division. When I started my career, I worked at secondary level, but, at the moment, I am working at primary level. I see a new generation coming along; I see a number of my former students, graduates from our immersion programs, now bringing their children to us.

This increase in our school populations can be attributed to the good experience the parents had in our schools when they were students. They are now choosing immersion for their children.

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

Your turn, Mr. Arseneault.

Mr. René Arseneault: Thank you for being here, gentlemen, Ms. Drzystek.

First, please excuse me for arriving 10 or 15 minutes late.

I am really full of admiration for you. In my eyes, you are like missionaries. You are anglophones and you are promoting French language and culture in areas like education.

Mr. Bentley, just now, you said that you take living in French for granted, that it is normal for you. On this committee, our concern is trying to catch children when they are very young, preparing them to go to elementary school in French and to ensure that they take it for granted.

What do you think about someone living in a francophone bubble at a very early age? Does the direction that children take in their subsequent studies, or the ease with which they can continue in French and English, depend on the fact that they have been immersed in French culture, or that they will be able to learn in French?

That was a long question. Do you want to answer it, Mr. Anderson?

• (1120)

Mr. Jeff Anderson: If I understand correctly, you are talking about children who already live in French before they get to school. Am I right?

Mr. René Arseneault: I am a francophone from New Brunswick. I come from Madawaska—Restigouche. Our friends from Quebec teach us that francophones outside Quebec have a minority complex. When we go to France or Quebec, some of us are embarrassed to speak French. Witnesses from British Columbia actually talked about that. It’s a fact: we have a minority complex.

But things are changing. For example, when Mr. Vandal addresses the national caucus as chair of the Liberal indigenous caucus, he speaks in English and French. Robert-Falcon Ouellette does the same, as do Mr. Samson, and Mr. Arseneault. Others do as well. It is incredible. But the fact remains that the minority complex is alive and well. It's all about feeling comfortable speaking the language.

In your opinion, is it important for learning in French to be provided to students from an early age, to ensure that, at elementary school, and in the secondary and post-secondary studies that follow, they will be interested in continuing their education in French?

Mr. Derrek Bentley: As I mentioned, this is Language Security 101. The earlier you start speaking French, the more confident you will be later. Yes, we must provide opportunities to speak French at a very early age, but later as well. French must not be just spoken at school.

Even if children begin to speak French at a very early age, after grade 10, they will wonder how they can live in French in a minority situation when they have never spoken French anywhere but in school. We have to start teaching them very young to trust in the quality of their French, but they must have opportunities to speak it in places other than school. That allows them to see that they can speak French everywhere in order to break down that minority complex.

That is what I experienced too. People should be able to speak French in places other than school so that they realize that they can actually speak it, without people judging them because of their accent or the mistakes they make, and so that they see that their French belongs to them, and that is fine.

You only improve your French by practising it. We often believe that people's French will be improved if we are constantly correcting them. Actually, I think it is the opposite. By not correcting them, and by giving them opportunities to practice, they will improve quickly. Knowing that we say "une mère" not "un mère" comes only with practice.

Mr. René Arseneault: Earlier, you mentioned federal aid and the need to create opportunities to live in French, outside a school context. What did you mean by that? What kind of federal aid were you talking about, and what would it be used for exactly?

Ms. Sandra Drzystek: I meant programs where students could be with their friends. I'm very glad you asked that question, because it touches on the notion of bilingual identity. In Canada, and in my home province of Manitoba, francophones or non-francophones, however you want to call them, all have this same complex. We need to address that complex and talk about what a linguistic trajectory means. Everyone has their own trajectory.

We can ask ourselves how we reacted when we felt insecure. Did we stay silent? Did we decide to push through? Did we have friends who could help us, encourage us, or correct us?

I'm referring to the idea of a bilingual trajectory that starts in grade 1 and continues through to grade 12 and beyond into adulthood.

What does it mean to be bilingual? Sometimes, it means not feeling confident. That is what we've found in Manitoba. Now we

use the term "linguistic insecurity". Both students and teachers lack confidence in their language skills.

How do we work on that? By valuing students' linguistic experiences. We're always talking about being bilingual, but nobody can really define what that means. Furthermore, there's a myth that immersion programs produce students who can speak French like someone from Quebec or France. By myth, I'm referring to parents' belief that once their children graduate from grade 12, they will be able to speak perfect French, like a native French speaker. That is not the goal, and what's more, it is not necessarily achievable for everyone. What we need to do is shift the focus and consider what it means to learn a language over the long term, for life, with all the mistakes and insecurity that entails.

That is part of a person's identity. This is a conversation we need to have. In education, we use the term "metacognition", which means reflecting on what you've done and what you can or can't do to improve.

• (1125)

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

The last intervention is from Mrs. Boucher.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Thank you very much. This is all fascinating. I'm going to continue in the same vein as my colleague, René Arseneault.

You said that in order to live in French, people need incentives outside the school context.

We've heard about the cultural scene in other provinces, but I would like to know if the cultural scene in Manitoba is adapted to the reality of bilingualism.

Do you have more access to anglophone culture than francophone culture?

I've always thought of culture as our deep roots. I myself am a francophone from Quebec, but I can tell you that not all Quebecers speak correct French. We have different dialects. The same goes for New Brunswick. Earlier you talked about the French spoken by the people of Quebec or France. In the same way, the French spoken in the Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean region is totally different from the French spoken in Quebec City or Montreal.

In your opinion, should the federal government be doing more to promote francophone culture to you?

Mr. Jeff Anderson: We definitely want to give our students the chance to learn about French culture. We Winnipeggers are very lucky because a lot of institutions there offer programs in both languages. We can take our kids to the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, the FortWhyte environmental centre, Oak Hammock Marsh, or the Manitoba Museum. All of these sites offer top-quality programs in both languages. There are many other examples. In the arts sector, the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra gives concerts in French as part of its school program. It is a wonderful performance. It's in French, and it's incredibly beautiful. In addition, musicians from other parts of Canada come through Winnipeg.

However, children enrolled in immersion programs in Brandon, Dauphin, and Thompson don't have access to so many resources. The federal government could improve things just by continuing to fund the development of such programs, but also by subsidizing travel costs to help children in more remote regions get to Winnipeg so they can take advantage of these programs. That would be important.

The issue of teachers lacking confidence came up earlier. The Université de Saint-Boniface offers an intensive language program called French immersion for teachers, or FIT, which helps French immersion or French as a second language teachers refine their language skills and fully adapt to their level. The federal government already provides some funding for these programs. More could certainly be done to help teachers by increasing support for these programs.

• (1130)

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: You bring up a good point.

In an urban centre like Winnipeg, these kinds of programs are easier to access. Distance is a factor. Francophones are scattered across the western provinces, and the same is true for the eastern provinces. Do immersion students outside major cities have the same access to these programs as students who live in urban centres?

Ms. Sandra Drzystek: I can answer that.

The federal government already provides funding through a revitalization program, involving Canada-Manitoba agreements that are really aimed at facilitating access to cultural and linguistic enrichment activities. There are grants for these activities, but they obviously cover only part of the cost.

I would like Manitoba's francophone cultural organizations to get funding so they can offer other programs across the province. Some do exist, but not enough. Yes, there is a symphony orchestra and some major organizations, but there are other people who can offer cultural activities in French. I want these people to receive the support they need to provide these activities in schools. That's important.

I want to add something about how the federal government could contribute. It could show Canadians across the country that Canada has a rich francophonie. The complex that has been mentioned is attributable to the fact that our bilingual Canadian identity... I really want to come back to this idea. A person's second language is different from their first language, but that doesn't mean there are no similarities. Manitoba has a rich francophone culture. French is a first language for some and a second language for others. What is the Canadian francophone identity? It's the image projected by people like me who have always studied and worked in French and who live in French here. People say that that's what Canada is, but I would like to see some kind of campaign around that idea.

The Chair: Mr. Bentley, do you have something to add?

Mr. Derrek Bentley: I have two points to make briefly. First, I think we need more content that comes from here, from Manitoba or the West, that represents our accents and our way of speaking. I also think that the accent and speech patterns of young francophones and young people learning French as a second language should be represented.

Second, I think something concrete could be done through the official languages in education program. We should look at how money is used by the provinces, how the provinces account to the federal government, and how we as citizens or members of an organization can ensure that the funding actually does go to support French as a first or second language programs and is used to take young people to a French play at the Théâtre cercle Molière, not to buy basketball equipment for young francophones.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bentley.

Mr. Arseneault, you have the last word.

Mr. René Arseneault: I have a question to ask, so it's not quite the last word. Can I have a minute, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. René Arseneault: Here is my burning question.

Ms. Drzystek, you said that the federal government's mission is to show Canadians the richness of bilingual culture. I'm older than you, but when I was little, I didn't even know there were anglophones in Canada. There was a Canadian program aimed at promoting bilingualism in Canada. I was too young to understand how it worked, but the spokesperson for the program was Angèle Arseneault, a native of Prince Edward Island. No relation, in case you were wondering. She sang songs like "*Bonjour, mon ami*, how are you, my friend? *Ça va très bien*, thank you".

In the modern era of inclusion and multiculturalism, how can we promote this idea and persuade people of its merits?

Ms. Sandra Drzystek: This is a cause that's close to my heart because a lot of people immigrate to Manitoba, like everywhere else in Canada, and many of these newcomers choose French immersion for their children, because they believe in it. Since Canada is a bilingual country, they believe their children are going to learn both official languages. They also hope Canada will encourage them to keep their own language and will see the value in that. That is why I think it's essential to talk about bilingualism, multilingualism, and Canadian identity for all Canadians.

Some people think it will be harmful to official languages. On the contrary, it will help convince people of the value of language learning and show them how languages can enrich their lives, especially their traditional languages. That's what Canada is all about.

People sometimes say:

[*English*]

the world needs more Canada,

[*Translation*]

And this is why. We are talking about this situation, but we need to go further. I hope this committee will consider the two official languages, which have a very important status, but will also consider the need to tell every new citizen that they are important and that we value the languages they speak. Together, we represent the richness of Canada.

•(1135)

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

Many thanks to you all for a great meeting and discussion. I commend you on your fundamental and absolutely amazing contribution to society.

Before we adjourn, I would ask you to stay in your seats so we can take a group picture.

The meeting is adjourned.

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