



January 2, 2023

The Honourable Adriana LaGrange M.L.A.
Minister of Education
228 Legislature Building
10800 - 97 Avenue NW
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6

Re: Issues around French Second Language Education – Open Letter

Dear Minister,

Canadian Parents for French (CPF) is a national network of volunteers which values French as an integral part of Canada and is dedicated to the promotion and creation of French-second-language (immersion and FSL) learning opportunities for young Canadians.

Recently, our Executive Director, Michael Tryon, had the opportunity to meet with your Executive Director of the Stakeholder Relations Division, Zoe Cooper, as well as the Director of French Language Services, Rachelle Bruneau. During that meeting, they discussed a variety of existing and emerging issues and topics. It was agreed upon that three (3) of these issues needed to be addressed and I am, therefore, bringing them to your attention.

In early December, Canadian Parents for French published the *2020-21 French as a Second Language Education Enrolment Statistics* (<https://cpf.ca/en/research-and-advocacy/research/enrolment-trends/>). These statistics showed two (2) things in regards to Alberta's enrolment:

- A decline in enrolment in French immersion (FI) of 1,395 students from the 2019-2020 school year.¹
- An even larger decline in enrolment in French Second Language (FSL) of 22,158 students from the 2019-2020 school year.¹

We anticipated a small decline in registrations for both programs as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, but were taken totally by surprise with how significant there were – especially in FSL. The Government of Alberta's French Policy not only broadly promises to support “the many thousands who have learned and continue to speak French as a second language”², but specifically states that “The government acknowledges that French-speaking communities are aware of the needs and priorities of the Albertans they represent.”⁴ Even though FI and FSL are not mandated under any legislation nor protected under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, one of the things that the Alberta French Policy aims to achieve is: “Albertans who choose to do so can learn, speak, live and thrive in French through the vitality of their communities.”⁵

For the first time ever, the Government of Canada has introduced An Act to amend the *Official Languages Act* which officially recognizes, in the preamble of the Act, “...the importance of accessing opportunities to learn a

#211, 15120-104 Avenue NW, Edmonton, AB T5P0R5
(780) 433-7311
cpfab@ab.cpf.ca
ab.cpf.ca

second official language for all Canadians.”⁶ and strengthen the commitment under Part VII of the Act to reinforce the “...learning, acceptance and appreciation of both official languages....”⁷. Between the Policy and the legislative changes that are being made to the *Official Languages Act*, it is necessary for all of us to address these issues and put a strategy in place to ensure “...that every student has the opportunity to learn French and access the French as a second language program that meets their needs and aspirations.”⁸

The second point that we wish to bring to your attention are the challenges that many Alberta school boards are having in recruiting and retaining qualified French-speaking educators. Alberta participated in the recently concluded, federally-funded “French Second Language Teacher Recruitment and Retention Project”. This was a three (3) year project with a total expenditure of \$180 million. Each province and territory was advised as to an annual amount their jurisdiction would be able to apply on. Applications were handled through your ministry’s Intergovernmental Relations Department and were then forwarded on to Canadian Heritage for final approval. At the end of year two, CPF Alberta approached your Director, Regena Wiseman, stating that one area that had not benefitted from this program was rural and small schools. Nationally, we came up with more than fifteen (15) great websites and some interesting promotional campaigns, but not one practical solution or project had been identified for supporting this group. CPF Alberta volunteered to partner with either your ministry or any other educational authority or organization in developing an application, but nothing ever came of it. As a matter of fact, Alberta did not put forward any individual one (1) year projects for the final year of funding. Rural schools offering French second language programs continue to struggle in locating quality and qualified teachers. We also know that are counterparts within the Francophone school systems that face the same issues. This needs to be addressed.

Finally, CPF Alberta appreciates that the French Language Arts and Literature (FLAL) curriculum document was translated into English so that English-only speaking school administrators and parents can understand its outcomes. The document that is currently available, however, has two (2) issues:

- The quality of the translation is not very good. It is very difficult – if not impossible – to translate a curriculum document geared towards learning a language into English. You cannot easily or properly translate all concepts, tenses and nuances of the language.
- It has come to our attention from a number of different sources that there are – unfortunately – some FLAL teachers who are using the English translation of the curriculum to actually teach the curriculum from. This needs to stop! All of our FI and FSL teachers speak French (we hope) and understand the need to use the French version of the curriculum.

We would like to suggest that the English version of the FLAL be removed from the website immediately and be replaced with a document that provides:

- Organizing ideas
- Guiding questions
- Learning outcomes with some limited examples of the knowledge, understanding, as well as skills and procedures required.

This new document would provide sufficient information for those non-French speaking administrators and parents to consult and have an understanding of what the curriculum is about.

Once again, we are presenting these issues to you as we feel that they need to be addressed. Please reach out to us should you require clarification or have additional questions. Our best point of contact is through Michael Tryon, our Executive Director, and he can be reached at mtryon@ab.cpf.ca. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Emma Piayda, BA, B.Ed, LLB, M.Ed
President

cc: Alberta French Language Education Consortium
Rachelle Bruneau, Director, French Education Service, Alberta Education
Le Conseil Français, Alberta Teachers' Association
Zoe Cooper, Executive Director, Stakeholder Relations Division, Alberta Education
Sarah Hoffman MLA, Edmonton Glenora
Isabelle Lauren, ACFA
Second Languages & Intercultural Council, Alberta Teachers' Association

¹ https://cpf.ca/wp-content/uploads/CPF_Nat_EnrolementStats_2016-2021_v4_FINAL.pdf (2022)

² https://cpf.ca/wp-content/uploads/CPF_Nat_EnrolementStats_2016-2021_v4_FINAL.pdf (2022)

³ <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/9818af69-7a54-43af-9d91-f899745d864c/resource/fbc613c8-aa52-4669-a3f9-80192a0a1283/download/french-policy-english.pdf> , page 1

⁴ <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/9818af69-7a54-43af-9d91-f899745d864c/resource/fbc613c8-aa52-4669-a3f9-80192a0a1283/download/french-policy-english.pdf> , page 8

⁵ <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/9818af69-7a54-43af-9d91-f899745d864c/resource/fbc613c8-aa52-4669-a3f9-80192a0a1283/download/french-policy-english.pdf> , page 3