

May 4, 2021

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

**Re: Open Letter on the Proposed Alberta Curriculum – French Immersion Language Arts and Literature**

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. Here in Alberta, the association is represented by over 4,100 members in 27 volunteer-based chapters around the province.

Curriculum documents have many objectives with the utmost being to guide learning and teaching. They should also serve as a clear communications tool to inform the public at large, community and stakeholders – with the priority being for the parents and the learners themselves. Having said this, CPF Alberta has worked with parents, language consultants, university academics and resources from outside of Alberta to thoroughly review the proposed Kindergarten to grade 6 French Immersion Language Arts and Literature (FLAL) curriculum to develop some key recommendations:

1. *The proposed FLAL curriculum **must** be made available in both official languages so that parents, school administrators and others can respond to its content with confidence and knowledge in order to be able to provide constructive feedback.* National statistics show that between 85-90% of parents of students in French immersion do not speak French. Additionally, in many Alberta schools the senior administrators in both the schools and the district do not speak French either. Normally one would then rely upon a district language consultant to support these positions, but with the reduced OLEP funding these positions no longer exist in many jurisdictions.
2. *The proposed FLAL curriculum **needs** to be revised so that it aligns with current up-to-date research in second language education and – in CPF’s consideration – be aligned with the most current version of the “Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment” Companion Volume (<https://rm.coe.int/common-european-framework-of-reference-for-languages-learning-teaching/16809ea0d4>). In its current form, the proposed FLAL curriculum clearly lacks a sense of direction and does not seem to be guided by a vision (an example of a vision for a curriculum can be found at <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary/fsl18-2013curr.pdf> on page 6 of the document). The necessary second language aspect is not evident throughout the document and that is a major concern. French immersion is a second language stream and this must guide all of the curriculum work.*

3. *Not only should oral skills be viewed with a clear distinction (oral comprehension, oral production – not presentation - and oral interaction), but the amount of focus on oral skills needs to be increased.*

Research has shown that early exposure to oral skills leads to greater fluency and linguistic capabilities as the student gets older. Even with the current curriculum, French immersion high school students graduate with a deficit in oral skills due to a variety of reasons, including but not limited to, the lack of non-curricular opportunities to use their oral French, the students' confidence level in the French (linguistic insecurity) and the significant differences in high school French immersion programs across the province.

Currently in the area of oral skills which the proposed FLAL curriculum identifies, there are concerns about the approach that need to be totally revisited:

- Oral presentations should be seen as a thing of the past unless it has a context like the CPF annual oral presentation event, "Concours d'arts oratoire".
  - Oral production is a very different model to integrate in pedagogy and leads to greater confidence in the learners.
  - Oral interaction and oral comprehension must become very prevalent in language acquisition and that is not clear from this document as there is no vision to support this.
  - Reading aloud with fluency is a totally misguided view of proficiency. Either we are focusing on reading for comprehension or authentic conversations. There is no research that supports the oral development through reading aloud. This concept needs to be eliminated.
4. *Rewrite the proposed curriculum and take time to produce a quality document!* Other provinces have taken up to five (5) years to complete this process. What is the rush? Take some time and do it well! For example, some of the following "Idée organisatrice" need to be taken out or integrated within a new structure:
- **La grammaire** : La compréhension et l'application de la grammaire favorisent une compréhension et une expression efficaces des idées à l'oral et à l'écrit.
  - **Le vocabulaire** : La compréhension du sens et de la formation des mots favorise la communication orale, la lecture et l'écriture.
  - **L'organisation des textes** : Différents genres de textes sont utilisés pour comprendre et exprimer des idées, des perspectives sur le monde et des informations culturelles.
  - **La fluidité en lecture** : Le développement de la fluidité en lecture favorise la compréhension et l'expression orale et écrite. This is a major red flag, and should totally disappear from the curriculum.

Additionally, grammar, vocabulary and organisation need to be embedded within skills and should support learners. They also need to be included in context, authentic tasks and should not be presented as 'French Content'. A language should never be presented as content to learn.

5. *The learner has to be the centrepiece of this proposed curriculum and the curriculum should be or feel like "can do statements".* Throughout the document the learner, their needs and their social reality is completely missing.
- As a learner, I would feel that learning French is very difficult and very complex, which it is not.
  - As a learner, I am presented with French as a content vs. skills to acquire.
  - As a learner, I do not see respect for my development. Is the goal to become a "Francophone and to speak correctly" or is it to become a solid French user with a lifelong vision?

It is also very important to remove the quantity of French Grammar and concepts in the documents and realign it all with an "Action-Oriented Model/Approach"

[http://www.edugains.ca/resourcesFSL/PDF/AGuideToReflectivePractice/Module3\\_ActionOrientedAppr](http://www.edugains.ca/resourcesFSL/PDF/AGuideToReflectivePractice/Module3_ActionOrientedAppr)

[oach\\_English.pdf](#) ). To measure quality, **connaissance, réflexion, communication** and **application** should replace **connaissance, comprehension, habilités** and **procedures**.

Overall, this document lacks the second language perspective. Several individuals have commented that at times it feels like a document written for French first language students and that it is similar to the proposed ELA curriculum which is also designed for native speakers. It also feels like it was a dumping ground of “language knowledge” to teach without any context, coherence and connections to levels of language acquisition and proficiency. One must also be aware that in French immersion, language is taught across and through all curriculae and be cognisant of and supported by French second language pedagogy.

The refusal by Alberta Education to see the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) as a valid structure that is recognized world-wide and as a valuable tool and guide for second language learning is either very political or ignorant. The large majority of other curriculum re-writes that have occurred in other Canadian jurisdictions – including British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario, Québec (in their French immersion program) and Nova Scotia - in the past ten (10) years, have included recognition and acceptance of the CEFR as both a valid tool and resource. Second language learners should benefit from the research that the Council of Europe used to develop it. We owe it to our children to provide them with the best methodology to create a new generation of multilingual learners – the rest of Canada does! It would be a shame for Alberta not to be on the same page.

This entire proposed French Language Arts and Literature curriculum should be scrapped and a new logical document should be created. Alberta Education should then go through many phases of revision – including obtaining valid input from parents. This should not be a rush job; we implore you to take your time and get it right!

Sincerely,



Victoria Wishart  
President