

Report of the Advisory Committee on Francophone Affairs to the Government of Saskatchewan



October 2022

The Education Continuum

Letter of Transmittal

Honorable Laura Ross
Minister of Parks, Culture and Sports, responsible for Francophone Affairs

I am pleased to submit this report for your review, following the December 10, 2021 meeting of the Advisory Committee on Francophone Affairs.

On this occasion, we met with representatives from the Ministry of Education as well as from community organizations and Francophone post-secondary institutions from the province to discuss access to education in French in Saskatchewan, from early childhood to grade 12.

On behalf of the Advisory Committee, I am pleased to present this report. The purpose of the recommendations is to guide the government in improving and expanding opportunities for a French-language education continuum in Saskatchewan.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. Dubé', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Michel Dubé
Chair, Advisory Committee on Francophone Affairs
October 2022

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Introduction

Education in French has always been one of the most prominent issues for the Fransaskois community, and the subject of political and legal battles. This concern is not surprising and is shared by other minority-Francophone communities across Canada. French-language education is one of the factors that most contributes to the vitality of the Fransaskois community by supporting the transfer and study of the French language and Fransaskois culture to young people and by providing spaces where students and community can live in French.

More than a quarter-century after implementation of education governance by Francophones and creation of the Conseil des écoles fransaskoises, French-language education in Saskatchewan is still confronted with several challenges. While developing appropriate education infrastructure is an important challenge facing the education continuum, this issue will not be dealt with in this report. The next Advisory Committee report will deal with infrastructure, including educational infrastructure.

To prepare this report, members of the Advisory Committee met with several community stakeholders in the education field as well as officials from the province's Ministry of Education. The members express their thanks for their participation in these meetings.

The education continuum usually includes programming from early childhood up to the post-secondary level. The Advisory Committee recently published a report on post-secondary education. This report will therefore focus on education from early childhood to Grade 12.

Recommendations

1. That the Ministry of Education, together with the Education Continuum Committee and spearheaded by the Assemblée communautaire fransaskoise, organize a summit bringing together stakeholders from the Francophone education sector to review challenges facing the education continuum.
2. That, when developing its education policies, the Ministry of Education takes into consideration its constitutional obligations towards French-language education and Saskatchewan's French-language Services Policy.
3. That the Ministry of Education recreate a Francophone Education Branch with the mandate to act as a champion for the development of the education continuum for Francophone education in Saskatchewan.
4. That the Ministry of Education set a specific target between now and 2025-2026 for the number of new \$10-per-day childcare spaces to be created in French-language childcare centres.
5. That the Ministry of Education undertake to better support stakeholders in the early childhood sector by providing adequate funding and by speeding up the translation, creation and adaptation of documents and resources in French.
6. That the Ministry of Education accelerate curriculum renewal and develop a support strategy for the development of educational French-language resources.
7. That the Ministry of Education, in collaboration with school divisions, continue to develop strategies for recruiting teachers, improving their working conditions, and increasing their retention.

Advisory Committee Mandate

In 2003, the Government of Saskatchewan adopted its French-language Services Policy. With this policy, the Government of Saskatchewan committed to “enhancing the services offered to Saskatchewan’s Francophone community in support of the development and vitality of this community.”¹

The policy is organized according to three areas:

1. Communication;
2. Development and delivery of services; and
3. Consultation.

The mandate of the Advisory Committee on Francophone Affairs is to advise the Minister of Parks, Culture and Sport, responsible for Francophone Affairs, through the review and analysis of programs and policies to guide the implementation of Saskatchewan’s French-language Services Policy.

Current State

The first observation at hand is that education stakeholders and officials from the Ministry of Education seem to have differing perceptions about the challenges that the Francophone education system currently faces. Community stakeholders brought forward several issues: problems with recruitment and retention of students and teaching staff, delays in developing the Fransaskois education curriculum, limited availability of education resources adapted to the Fransaskois reality and difficulties in obtaining adequate provincial funding.

In contrast, officials from the Ministry of Education presented a much more optimistic view of the situation of French-language education. Without denying the challenges, they nonetheless emphasized ministry initiatives aimed at alleviating these challenges, such as renewing curricula collaboratively or co-constructing curricula by including teachers from the Conseil des écoles fransaskoises in the writing and piloting phases and French organizations in feedback sessions; and, entering into bilateral agreements with the federal government to procure funding for French minority-language and French second-language initiatives, including agreements for teacher recruitment initiatives.

Members of the Advisory Committee believe that community stakeholders and ministry officials differ in their assessment of the situation and are not describing the same reality. At a time when the Ministry of Education is working on developing the next provincial education strategy, this discrepancy in perception is concerning. While the Advisory Committee recognizes that the Conseil des écoles fransaskoises is a member of the Provincial Education Plan Implementation Team, there are other Francophone community stakeholders that should be part of a specific engagement initiative on Francophone education.

¹[Government of Saskatchewan French-language Services Policy](#)

There is a real risk that the new strategy will not sufficiently address the specific challenges to French-language education in Saskatchewan. It is therefore important for stakeholders and the Ministry of Education to take stock of the challenges specific to Francophone education and determine steps to be taken to alleviate these challenges. The Advisory Committee believes that organizing a summit for French education in Saskatchewan would enable the Fransaskois community and the government to come to a common understanding on the subject. Ideally, such a summit would be organized jointly with the community in a spirit of partnership.

While Francophone education in Saskatchewan has its challenges, it also has special constitutional status. Section 23 of *The Constitution Act, 1982* guarantees the right, where numbers warrant, of Francophone parents to educate their children in French in establishments managed by the official-language minority. Additionally, Saskatchewan's French-language Services Policy sets out commitments to providing services in French, including education.

Since the dismantling of the Francophone Education Branch within the Ministry of Education, many branches (curriculum, infrastructure, funding, etc.) are sharing the responsibility for Francophone education. The lack of a branch with a clear mandate to act as a champion for Francophone education is limiting the development of the education continuum and the implementation of a comprehensive vision of Francophone education in a minority setting, from the early years to postsecondary educations.

Recommendation 1

That the Ministry of Education, together with the Education Continuum Committee and spearheaded by the Assemblée communautaire fransaskoise, organize a summit bringing together stakeholders from the Francophone education sector to review challenges facing the education continuum.

Recommendation 2

That, when developing its education policies, the Ministry of Education takes into consideration its constitutional obligations towards French-language education and Saskatchewan's French-language Services Policy.

Recommendation 3

That the Ministry of Education recreate a Francophone Education Branch with the mandate to act as a champion for the development of the education continuum for Francophone education in Saskatchewan.

Early Childhood

On August 13, 2021, Saskatchewan and the federal government signed a major agreement regarding early childhood. This agreement commits to creating 28,000 new childcare spaces, training educators (including French), and reducing childcare costs for parents. Unlike the early childhood agreement of June 12, 2017, the 2021 agreement does not set a target number of spaces in Francophone centres.

Over the past 20 years, the Fransaskois community has developed a growing network of childcare centres. These Francophone childcare centres play a key role in supporting the vitality of the community because they encourage young children to use French daily and help them prepare for French-language schooling. These childcare centres are the gateway to the Francophone education continuum in Saskatchewan.

Despite its growth, the current network of French-language childcare centres does not meet the demand for childcare in French. Existing early childhood centres have waiting lists for parents who wish to enrol their children in a Francophone childcare centre. Reduced childcare costs has the potential to increase these waitlists by making childcare more accessible to more parents. Additionally, French-language childcare services are not available in all communities. When these services are unavailable or waiting lists are too long, Francophone parents have no choice but to enrol their children in an English-language daycare, which is detrimental to learning French.

The Government of Saskatchewan has played an important role in supporting the creation of French-language childcare spaces. This support is expected to continue and should be achieved by setting a target number of Francophone childcare spaces to be created by 2025-2026. Setting a target would ensure that the childcare needs of the Fransaskois community are addressed by the provincial government. This approach is not new and has already been proven. As mentioned above, the June 2017 early childhood agreement had a target of 65 new French-language childcare spaces. This target has been exceeded: 75 childcare spaces were created.

Childcare is not the only provincially funded effort that prepares children for school. Parent services, such as play groups or early years support centres, also fulfill this role. Unfortunately, the lack of French-language resources and adequate funding for other early childhood programs — whether for play groups or early years support centres — is a barrier to school preparation. To be truly effective, early childhood services must have access to additional funding and up-to-date educational resources (e.g. development programs) tailored to the needs of the Fransaskois community.

Recommendation 4

That the Ministry of Education set a specific target between now and 2025-2026 for the number of new \$10-per-day childcare spaces to be created in French-language childcare centres.

Recommendation 5

That the Ministry of Education undertake to better support stakeholders in the early childhood sector by providing adequate funding and by speeding up the translation, creation and adaptation of documents and resources in French.

Curriculum Renewal

Delays in updating elementary and secondary programs in French were one of the major issues raised by community stakeholders. Some programs have not been updated for nearly 20 years. Additionally, the relatively small size of the Francophone student population in Saskatchewan limits the availability of textbooks. Broadly speaking, textbook publishers do not have incentives to develop textbooks for French-language programs, requiring French-language teachers to use textbooks designed for programs from other provinces and adapt them, as needed, to the contents of Saskatchewan curriculum.

Members of the Advisory Committee were informed that a Curriculum Advisory Committee has been established to make recommendations to the Minister of Education regarding future curriculum development and renewal, and Saskatchewan's high school graduation requirements, beyond 2023. They appreciate that one of the members of this committee represents the Conseil des écoles francsaskoises and that one parent representative is Francophone. However, while the members of the Advisory Committee on Francophone Affairs recognize these efforts, they feel that the results are not forthcoming in a timely manner to meet the needs.

Delays in program upgrading and a lack of resources in French negatively affect the working conditions of teachers and impose an additional burden on them. This exacerbates the exodus of Francophone teachers to the majority-language setting and creates a high turnover rate, affecting students' learning. It is crucial that the Ministry of Education accelerate curriculum renewal and develop a strategy to support the development of French-language educational resources. These two issues should be on the agenda for the Francophone Education Summit.

Recommendation 6

That the Ministry of Education accelerate curriculum renewal and develop a support strategy for the development of educational French-language resources.

Teaching Staff Shortage

Saskatchewan is not the only province where French-language education is experiencing these challenges. The shortage of Francophone teachers is a problem across the entire country. According to a study by Canadian Parents for French, there is an estimated shortage of approximately 10,000 French teachers in Canada. Many new teachers leave the profession within five years of earning their diploma. This shortage is not only indicative of a problem in recruitment, but also a retention problem.

School divisions are responsible for hiring teachers and for their working conditions, however, the extent of the teacher shortage exceeds the ability of school divisions to act alone. Under federal-provincial agreements on French-language education, the federal government has made commitments to address teacher shortages by providing additional funding. Advisory Committee members were informed that the Ministry of Education already has two multi-year federal-provincial projects for both French minority-language and French second-language teacher recruitment and retention.

The Advisory Committee does not pretend to have a magic solution to address the shortage of teaching staff. The Advisory Committee nevertheless recognizes that it is a major problem threatening the viability of teaching the French-language and teaching in French in Saskatchewan and recommends that the government work with school divisions to tackle the problem head-on.

Recommendation 7

That the Ministry of Education, in collaboration with school divisions, continue to develop strategies for recruiting teachers, improving their working conditions, and increasing their retention.

Conclusion

The Advisory Committee recognizes the actions being taken by the Ministry of Education and was encouraged by its positive participation during this meeting. However, the gap between the Ministry of Education and sector stakeholders with regards to how the challenges facing the French-language education system are perceived is worrisome to the members of the Advisory Committee. More than a quarter-century after the implementation of education governance by Francophones and the creation of the Conseil des écoles fransaskoises, French-language education in Saskatchewan is still confronted with several challenges that these recommendations aim to address.

List of Members

At the December 10, 2021 Advisory Committee meeting, the members were as follows:

Michel Dubé (Chair), Prince Albert

Michel Dubé was born in Duck Lake. He has been involved with the Francophone community in Saskatchewan for a long time, notably in community development and education. He was a member of the board of the Assemblée communautaire fransaskoise between 1999 and 2010, first as the community representative from the Prince Albert district and then as president between 2006 and 2010. Mr. Dubé has been a journalist, consultant and entrepreneur. He has owned several businesses including a produce farm and a fishing lodge. He is now owner of a small store featuring local goods and operates a bison farm north of Prince Albert.

Janice Murphy, Regina

Living in Saskatchewan for almost 20 years, Janice first worked at Collège Mathieu, offering, among other things, computer training for Francophone women in the province. She has volunteered with various Fransaskois associations, including the Fédération provinciale des Fransaskoises (FPF), the Association communautaire fransaskoise de Gravelbourg (ACFG), and the Association canadienne-française de Regina. She founded a family with her spouse from the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, enabling her to experience French education from daycare to Grade 12, and to better understand the challenges and successes of French-speaking newcomers. She currently works as a senior human resources partner with the Crown Corporation, Farm Credit Canada (FCC).

Élizabeth Perreault, Bellevue

Élizabeth Perreault and her husband own and operate a farm near Bellevue. Ms. Perreault has volunteered within many organizations in her community, including the local Francophone association and the Francophone school in her area. She has represented the St-Isidore school district (Bellevue) on the Conseil scolaire fransaskois since 2008.

Roger Gauthier, Saskatoon

Living in Saskatchewan for the past 40 years, Mr. Gauthier has been actively involved in the Fransaskois community both as a professional and as a volunteer at the local, provincial and national levels in multiple sectors: communications, economics, community development, cultural and artistic development, education, and involvement with parent and early childhood issues. Over the past seven years, his commitment has focused more specifically on improving access to health services in French through his role with the Réseau Santé en français.

Hélène Grimard, Saskatoon

Born and raised Fransaskoise, Hélène Grimard has not only maintained her first language, but has also helped it flourish by directing her career and volunteer work towards learning at all levels. Her career has focused mainly on French immersion and core French education, as well as education in Fransaskois schools, as she has taken on a wide variety of roles: member of the support staff, teacher, member of the school administration, and manager. She has been teaching provincial and federal public servants and has also taught courses for the Alliance française. As a volunteer, she has collaborated with Canadian Parents for French to promote their Concours d'art oratoire (a public speaking competition) and organized the competition of the Saskatoon Catholic School Board's French immersion schools. She has sat on the executive board of the Saskatchewan Association of Teachers of French (SATF) and on the executive

board of the Fédération des Francophones de Saskatoon. As well, she sat on the Conseil scolaire francaskois as a representative of the Saskatoon region between 2017 and 2020. She is currently an administrator of the Association des parents francaskois and a member of the University of Saskatchewan Senate, mandated by the Assemblée communautaire francaskoise to ensure the Francophone community's voice is heard.

Jolanta Bird, Saskatoon

Jolanta Bird is a student, entrepreneur and active community member. As an Aboriginal woman, she is keen to learn about First Nations traditions, notably through her involvement with the Gordon Tootosis Nikaniwin Theatre Company. She graduated from École Valois in Prince Albert where she was president of the student council. She is active in the Francophone community as vice-president of the Association jeunesse francaskoise (Francaskois youth association). As a board member of the youth association, she participated in a conference marking the 50th anniversary of the *Official Languages Act*. She currently studies Business at the University of Saskatchewan and plans to pursue her studies in Law.

Denis Simard, Regina

Denis Simard has been involved in the Canadian Francophonie for many years. A graduate of College Mathieu in Gravelbourg, Denis was Executive Director of the Association jeunesse francaskoise and of the Assemblée communautaire francaskoise (ACF). An engaged Francaskois citizen, he first became involved with the Conseil jeunesse francophone de la Colombie-Britannique, the Conseil culturel francaskois, and the Centre culturel Maillard. He was elected president of the ACF in 2018.

Alpha Barry, Regina

Alpha Barry was born in Senegal, a country famed for its hospitality ("teranga" in Wolof), and has lived in Saskatchewan since 2005. A proud Francophone, husband, and father of three young children, he has been a board member of the Conseil scolaire francaskois since November 2014, and has been its Chair since 2017. He is also a member of the University of Saskatchewan's Senate, mandated by the Saskatchewan School Boards Association to speak on behalf of the school community, from kindergarten to Grade 12. Mr. Barry holds a degree in Business Administration and is a member of Chartered Managers Canada (CIM). He is part of the administrative team at the University of Regina, as the operations manager and project coordinator for French-language health training for La Cité universitaire francophone of Regina.