

#OLLO - The Senate Committee on Official Languages

HORIZON 2018: TOWARD STRONGER SUPPORT OF FRENCH-LANGUAGE LEARNING IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

Major challenges exist in accessing French language opportunities in British Columbia.

B.C. parents with the right to have their children educated in French first-language under section 23 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* face a shortage of schools, or schools that are overcrowded and aged – leaving their children with the risk of losing their linguistic birthright.

With regard to French immersion programs, B.C. parents who do not have constitutionally-guaranteed rights but who want their children to receive French second-language education also face major access barriers.

While there are still many challenges, there is hope that the situation can be addressed. In 2018, the federal government will renegotiate the *Protocol for Agreements for Minority-Language Education and Second-Language Instruction* with the provinces and territories. The next multi-year official languages plan will also be announced in 2018.

The Senate Committee on Official Languages, which has been studying the challenges of accessing French-language education in British Columbia, urges the federal government to seize this opportunity to live up to its obligations under the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and the *Official Languages Act*, and provide the support required.

The committee proposes a series of recommendations and observations to the federal government in order to:

- ▶ Improve access to francophone schools;
- ▶ Increase bilingualism among youth;
- ▶ Review the funding mechanism and improve accountability; and
- ▶ Support the vitality of francophone communities.

The B.C. government, with federal government support, should also work with French-language education stakeholders to implement the report's recommendations.



KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Minister of Canadian Heritage conclude a special agreement with British Columbia's Ministry of Education to respond to the pressing infrastructure needs of the francophone community in negotiating the new protocol for agreements on education in 2018.

That the Minister of Public Services and Procurement intervene with the Canada Lands Company Ltd. to promptly acquire lands that are already 50% owned by this Crown corporation in order to build two schools that will meet the needs of Vancouver's francophone community.

That the Minister of Canadian Heritage, in collaboration with British Columbia's Ministry of Education ensure access for everyone to French immersion programs in B.C. and commit to increased and sustained funding for these programs.

That the Minister of Canadian Heritage, in negotiating the new Protocol for Agreements on Education and the next multi-year official languages plan, commit to increasing the envelope for Intergovernmental Cooperation on Education, for example by providing:

- a) support for school infrastructure and school transportation in francophone schools;
- b) support for post-secondary institutions to provide basic training and continuing education for French teachers; and
- c) language and cultural exchanges and authentic experiences for students enrolled in French first-language and French second-language education, as well as for teachers.

That the Minister of Canadian Heritage provides support for post-secondary institutions to ensure basic training and continuing education for French teachers.

QUICK FACTS

LANGUAGE RIGHTS IN CANADA

- ▶ **Section 23 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* guarantees minority language educational rights. Under the Charter, Canadian citizens whose first language is that of English or French, and are a minority population in their home province have the right to have their children receive primary and secondary school instruction in that language subject to certain criteria.**
- ▶ **The *Official Languages Act* is intended in part to support the development of English and French linguistic minority communities.**
- ▶ **Part VII of the Act commits the federal government to enhancing the vitality of these communities and fostering the full recognition and use of English and French in Canadian society. It also says the government must take "positive measures" to implement this commitment.**



READ THE REPORT

Horizon 2018: Toward Stronger Support of French-language Learning in British Columbia

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