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Chair

The Honourable Michael Chong

Standing Committee on Official Languages

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•(1530)

[Translation]

The Chair (Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC)): Welcome to the 83rd meeting of the Standing Committee on Official Languages. Today is Tuesday, May 28, 2013. Pursuant to Standing Order 108, we are studying second official language immersion programs in Canada.

[English]

Before we begin,

[Translation]

I have two things to tell you.

First, we only have one witness for the Thursday meeting, and also one for our meeting next Tuesday. So I am going to cancel Thursday's meeting and call both witnesses for next Tuesday's meeting.

[English]

That's the first thing I wanted to tell you.

Secondly, we will have bells at 4:10 p.m. today. It's a 30-minute notice for the votes.

The first thing I wanted to ask members of the committee is, do you want to adjourn at the 30-minute bell or do you want to adjourn 10 minutes into that bell or 15 minutes into that bell? I need some guidance on that.

I'm sorry. I mean suspend—suspend 10 minutes into the bell, 30 minutes...?

Mr. Galipeau.

Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC): As much as I hate to admit this, I'm not fully mobile and I need all my time to get there.

The Chair: All right. We will suspend when the bells ring, but we'll hear an opening statement from Canadian Parents for French. We'll then suspend for 50 minutes. We'll come back at 4:30 to continue the meeting.

If you can't make it back in time for 4:30, that's okay. We'll work on a reduced quorum to receive witness testimony.

At 4:30 we'll hear from Canadian Heritage for their 10-minute opening statement, we'll continue with questions and comments for 50 minutes, and adjourn at 5:30. Okay? That's the plan of action for today.

In one last note, we have a tentative date set with Minister Kenney. They're going to confirm it with us. It's tentative. It is supposed to be June 13. It's tentative, but we've not yet received final confirmation. When we do, we will be sure to communicate with the committee.

We have one witness group in front of us now. From Canadian Parents for French, I want to welcome Madam Perkins and Monsieur Rthon. We'll begin with an opening statement.

Mrs. Lisa Marie Perkins (President, National Office, Canadian Parents for French): Thank you again for the opportunity to present, Mr. Chair and members of the committee, and for the opportunity to use this video conference technology, which allows me to stay closer to home and work, but it also makes me more accessible to work as well. It helps me balance a little bit.

Canadian Parents for French is dedicated to the creation and promotion of French second language opportunities for youth in Canada. We've been doing so for many years.

[Translation]

We are pleased that we can both come before you again, one in person and one by videoconference.

[English]

Given the limited amount of time we have for our appearance, I will refer you to our brief for detailed information on the points raised in our presentation today.

Our brief to the committee provides an overview of French second language education in Canada and—

The Chair: Madam Perkins, if you can still hear us, could you pause your statement? We're having trouble receiving the video and audio.

Mr. Rthon, do you have the opening presentation?

•(1535)

Mr. Robert Rthon (Executive Director, National Office, Canadian Parents for French): Yes, I do.

The Chair: Would you be able to provide it to us?

Mr. Robert Rthon: Sure.

The Chair: My apologies. The video link is not working for some reason.

Mr. Rthon, you have the floor.

Mr. Robert Rthon: Thank you.

As Ms. Perkins began to say, our brief to the committee provides an overview of French second language education in Canada and contextualizes long-standing CPF recommendations on how to improve current FSL programs, when children should be introduced to FSL programs, improving access to these programs, especially for immigrants and academically challenged children, the introduction of programs to assist post-secondary students, and official languages and education program agreements.

Today, we will expand on CPF's stance regarding the OLEP agreements and how we can make them even more beneficial to French second language learning in Canada. We'll cover two key areas: a), accountability and transparency, and b), an outcomes-based approach.

Regarding the first point, each province and territory negotiates a separate agreement, flowing from the master agreement negotiated by Canadian Heritage and CMEC. This can be positive in that it allows each provincial or territorial action plan to address the particular needs of its jurisdiction and education system. Yet in many instances it has proven challenging to obtain information on these agreements, to be part of the process that helps inform them, and to track the results of the expenditure of funds.

The principal challenge, in our minds, resides in understanding the path the money takes once it reaches the provinces and territories. Does it go to classrooms, to projects, to administration, to FSL-only activities, or into general revenue? This is important to know because money is invariably at the root of the constraints on FSL and FI program growth. Things such as no transportation, no teachers, no classrooms, and no special supports for students with special needs or learning challenges.... Even now, we do not know the true start-up costs of an early French immersion program. If you're a school district trying to determine if you want a program or not, this is a crucial question to be able to answer.

I see that Ms. Perkins is back with us. Shall we...?

The Chair: Ms. Perkins, can you hear us?

Mrs. Lisa Marie Perkins: I sure can.

The Chair: Can you continue where Mr. Rethon has left off?

Mrs. Lisa Marie Perkins: Where did he leave off?

[*Translation*]

Where did you get to, Mr. Rethon?

Mr. Robert Rethon: Madam President,

[*English*]

I just ended the first section, accountability and transparency. You can start on the outcomes-based approach.

Mrs. Lisa Marie Perkins: Sure. We'll give this a go again. Good old technology.

Financial reporting alone, however accurate or complete, does not measure the complete success of FSL programs across Canada, and we'd like to encourage the adoption of an outcomes-based approach in the next round of our OLEP agreements, one using real and measurable targets. Again, our experience is that in the past our OLEP agreements have not leveraged federal funding as successfully as they might have, and we believe it is time for the federal

government to provide greater leadership in setting meaningful targets.

[*Translation*]

For example, only one agreement, the one with Ontario, sets as a goal an increase in the number of students with learning disabilities. No agreement addresses the problems that immigrant children have in accessing French as a second language programs.

Canadian Parents for French asks that the next agreements encourage the development of policies that will provide students with learning difficulties and immigrant students fair access to French as a second language programs.

[*English*]

Also, while past agreements have sought to maintain or increase the number of students in FSL programs with kindergarten to grade 12 retention rates of roughly 36% for FI and 6% for core French, aggressive targets increasing student retention should be a feature of new agreements.

Canadian Parents for French recommends that all OLEP agreements should encourage policies that address the issue of retention of students in FSL programs.

[*Translation*]

Canada's official languages roadmap has created a vision for the future of the official languages and for bilingualism in Canada. We believe that the agreements are tools that can make that vision into a reality.

[*English*]

CPF recommends that all OLEP agreements establish measures to assess the effectiveness of FSL programs, and upon the closing of these agreements in 2017 a report be drawn up illustrating the successes of these programs and a list of best practices for our future agreements.

Thank you.

• (1540)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you for your presentation.

Go ahead, Mr. Dion.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Do we have a copy of what our witnesses have just read to us?

The Chair: No.

[*English*]

No, we don't. We have a brief they submitted and that's been distributed, but we do not have a copy of the opening statement.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: If you ask her to provide it to us, it would be helpful.

Not now but in the future.

[Translation]

The Chair: Okay.

Could I ask Ms. Perkins or Mr. Rothon to provide us with a copy of your remarks?

Mr. Robert Rothon: Certainly.

[English]

The Chair: Okay, thank you very much. We'll get that distributed.

Thank you, Mr. Dion.

We'll begin with a question from Monsieur Dionne Labelle.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle (Rivière-du-Nord, NDP): Thank you.

Welcome to our two witnesses, the one with us and the one on the screen.

Could you talk to me a little about how immigrants are integrated? In your report, which was presented to the Senate committee, I understand, you mention that immigrants are most willing to register their children in French as a second language courses, but that few of those courses are available across Canada.

Can you tell us about that situation?

[English]

Mrs. Lisa Marie Perkins: In our Senate brief—I've touched on it in this presentation, and I know it's in our briefing documents—one of the challenges is the integration of immigrants. We know that as a country our population base is going to be receiving more and more immigrant families. It's important that they have access to language education, in both our official languages. In some provinces, such as British Columbia, in some school jurisdictions when a child is in ESL, they're automatically not eligible for FSL, for example.

The second challenge for immigrant families is that it's automatically assumed they would not be interested in French second language education. Research that we have commissioned by Callie Mady suggests exactly the opposite, that most immigrant families, when given the opportunity to know about French immersion or core French, would be quite happy to have the opportunity for their children to learn both official languages.

[Translation]

Do you have anything to add to that, Mr. Rothon?

Mr. Robert Rothon: It must be said that some school boards have still managed to include children of immigrant families in French as a second language courses. If the welcome mat is out and appropriate policies are in place, immigrant populations will be interested and will definitely learn both of Canada's official languages. There is no problem with that.

[English]

Frankly, as Ms. Perkins pointed out, the real challenge is getting provincial and territorial policies aligned. So, for example, if you're a school district and you receive ESL funding, it doesn't exclude you from receiving FSL funding for the same type of student. There are some real challenges there.

However, I think it's a crucial long-term goal to make sure that linguistic duality is part of the immigrant youth experience.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Perkins and Mr. Rothon, for your opening speech and also for this brief question.

We appreciate your opening statement to our committee, and we look forward to continuing with questions for your colleague after the votes. We will reconvene here at 4:30.

The bells and the lights are going for the votes, so without further ado, we will suspend.

● (1540)

(Pause)

● (1630)

● (1635)

[Translation]

The Chair: We now resume the 83rd meeting of the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

I welcome the officials from the Department of Canadian Heritage. They are Mr. Lussier, Mr. Gauthier and Mr. Déry.

You have the floor for your presentation.

Mr. Hubert Lussier (Assistant Deputy Minister, Citizenship and Heritage, Department of Canadian Heritage): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to say a few words before handing things over to my colleague Jean-Pierre Gauthier, who will make the presentation.

I would certainly like to thank you for giving us the opportunity to talk about second languages, a key topic for the Department of Canadian Heritage for many years. My colleagues Jean-Pierre Gauthier, Director General of the Official Languages Branch, and Yvan Déry, Director of Policy and Research in the Official Languages Branch of the Department of Canadian Heritage, are with me today to answer your questions.

[English]

With your permission, I'd like to explain the context briefly of what Jean-Pierre is going to speak about. The presentation he's going to make deals with minority language as well as second language education.

As you know, minority language education refers to the schooling of students of official language minority communities, therefore those who receive English schooling in Quebec and French elsewhere in Canada.

Although second official language learning and official language minority education are two distinct lines of business, with two different complementary objectives that belong to two separate programs at Canadian Heritage, from the point of view of their delivery mechanisms and the requirement for a strong collaboration with provinces and territories, they follow the same logic and use common instruments. Therefore, we will make a presentation in the following fashion.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Pierre Gauthier (Director General, Official Languages Branch, Department of Canadian Heritage): My thanks to the members of the committee, and thank you, Mr. Chair. In order to maximize the time for questions, I propose to provide a brief overview of the presentation that has been circulated to you. Without further introduction, I will begin.

The first page of our presentation provides you with a reminder of the legal framework that governs minority language and second language education. Section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms is also mentioned. This section defines the right of Canadians to have their children educated in their first official language.

We also mention that a provision of the Official Languages Act requires the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages to take the measures deemed necessary to assist the provinces to offer English- and French-speaking Canadians in minority situations an education in their own language and to provide young Canadians with an opportunity to learn their second official language. Those, therefore, are the bases on which the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages may become involved in education matters, in collaboration with the provinces.

The next page tries to put things into context and to provide a little clarification on the existing mechanism that produces the agreements that we have with the provinces and territories on education matters.

• (1640)

[*English*]

The first thing to mention is that this collaboration has been in place for about 40 years, and it proceeds in two steps. The first step is to have an overall multilateral agreement with all the provinces and territories and the federal government to establish the baselines, to establish the allocation of resources, and to establish the key parameters collectively.

After that, as a second step, we have bilateral agreements that we negotiate with each province in turn. For these we have discussions with the respective provinces or territories to try to capture their objectives in terms of their education system and what they want to focus on in the coming term—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: Excuse me for interrupting, Mr. Gauthier.

Mr. Chair, is it possible for me to introduce a motion now?

The Chair: About what?

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: I want to make a motion that we study the matter of the Maritime Rescue Centre in Quebec City.

The Chair: I am sorry, but it is not possible to do that, given that we have witnesses with us at the moment.

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: My motion is out of order?

The Chair: Have you submitted a notice of motion to us? I don't think so.

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: I am sorry, Mr. Chair, but that notice of motion was submitted a long time ago.

The Chair: That notice of motion was submitted by Mr. Godin. But he is not here with us today. So you cannot present that motion at this time.

Besides, we have witnesses appearing before us.

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: I am sorry for the interruption.

The Chair: Let me explain the situation we have at present.

[*English*]

Right now, we're under the routine motion adopted by the committee, which says that we're on reduced quorum. The chair will not allow any motions to be moved because we're simply on reduced quorum in order to receive witness testimony.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: I understand your decision, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: The routine motion says:

That the Chair is authorized to hold meetings to receive evidence and to have that evidence printed when a quorum is not present, provided that at least four (4) members are present, including one (1) member of the opposition and one (1) member of the government party.

That's the basis on which I continued this meeting, so we didn't even have quorum to allow a motion to be moved. It's for those two reasons....

[*Translation*]

Basically, first, Mr. Godin is not with us at the moment, and second, we have a reduced quorum. That is why the motion is out of order at the present time.

Mr. Gauthier, you have the floor.

Mr. Jean-Pierre Gauthier: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The multilateral protocol for agreements that we have in effect provides us with broad parameters. We negotiate bilateral agreements with each province according to their needs. On page 4, you see a quick overview of the content of the protocol for agreements.

First, the annual funding for immigration has been set at \$259 million. You can see that the major part of the funding is set aside to support provinces in minority-language education or second-language learning. Those two aspects combined come to \$234.5 million. A little less than 10% of the funding is allocated each year to two youth programs managed by the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada. These programs provide exchanges; they also allow language monitors to join teachers in classrooms in order to help with and enhance the teaching of the first or second language. That gives you an idea of the scope of the protocol for agreements in financial terms.

As we talk about the factors that go into the federal-provincial-territorial agreements, we must deal with the way in which the performance and the outcomes are evaluated. Page 5 explains that the agreement protocol sets out six outcome domains that are agreed with the provinces. Within those outcome domains, each province is asked, in each bilateral agreement, which initiatives it wishes to undertake in the areas of second-language or minority-language teaching. The table gives you some examples of the kinds of initiatives that provinces or territories can undertake in order to reflect the outcome domains identified in the agreement protocol.

Page 6 shows how the accountability system is subsequently structured. We are well aware that this is an area of provincial or territorial jurisdiction. The provinces therefore establish their priorities according to their overall priorities in the area of education. During the discussions that they have with us, the provinces also identify and specify performance targets and indicators that they are going to use. We document the objectives, the targets and the indicators as established by the provinces and we are content with them. Each year, we make sure that the funds spent by the provinces match the planning established under our agreements.

First, the provinces and territories submit annual financial reports. Every two years, we ask them to measure their progress in terms of their targets. A discussion between our offices and the provinces then takes place. The goal is to make sure that the progress and the efforts that have been made are fully measured.

• (1645)

[English]

In addition, you have the regular processes in the departments—that is, evaluations and internal audits—that are also applied to these agreements for these programs.

Finally, in terms of reporting, we have the annual reporting of the department, which captures the essence of our activities.

You'll find on pages 7 and 8 a selection of examples of those targets to illustrate a bit better what kinds of things we are talking about. If I take the first example, it will give you, for teaching of the second language, what kinds of targets have been established by, for example, the Northwest Territories with respect to the participation of students.

You have the target they set at the beginning of the agreement, and in the right-hand column you basically have the results of what they achieved so far, at the interim report stage, which is year two, 2010-11. We just concluded year four on March 31, and we're expecting reports from the provinces and territories that will give us a complete overview over the whole four years of the last protocol agreements we have.

Just in passing, you have the same thing on page 8, but this time it's for teaching in the minority language as part of the activities we have with provinces and territories. Again, it's a selection of targets and the kinds of achievements provinces have reported back to us in their biennial reports on progress and results.

[Translation]

Let us now move to pages 9 and 10. By taking a step back, we try to get an overall picture of which results and which achievements we

can identify as activities in the area of second-language and minority-language learning.

On page 9, we can see the achievements in second-language education. About 2.4 million young Canadians are learning English or French as a second language. That is a little more than half the school population. We also see that immersion programs are highly popular, with strong growth and demand.

Among the achievements in the second-language area, we also see innovative second-language teaching methods like, for example, intensive learning in one language. At the moment, 8,000 students are involved in the provinces and territories.

We also see improvements in the measurement of learning, but that is an area that you have already heard about. This is the ability to properly measure and certify the level of language mastery attained by a student. In a second language, of course. Thought and work is needed in this area, and steps are being taken to properly measure the quality of the learning.

We can also see that particular attention is paid to exchanges and cultural activities in immersion in order to enrich the experience of learning a second language, so this is not simply an experience limited to a classroom.

The next page, page 10, shows more or less the same approach, but this time it deals with minority-language education. About 240,000 young Canadians are studying in their language in a minority situation. This student population is increasing, whereas the general student population across the country is dropping slightly. This is encouraging.

We see that schools want to play a greater role in their communities. They want to be part of community life. So a number of schools also want to become involved in community activities after school hours or on weekends. They want to provide services like public libraries, for example. To the extent possible, things are brought together in different facilities. You will see figures from various places, like the 37 community learning centres in Quebec, where there is an attempt to play a greater role in minority situation schools. They do not want to limit themselves to teaching the Department of Education's program. They want the school to play a role in the community as well.

Efforts are also being made a post-secondary level. You can see in the presentation that there are programs in more than 40 colleges and universities in minority situations. I would also like to highlight the work that is being done by our colleagues at Health Canada and Justice Canada, each of which is trying, in its own area of activity, to develop a program in various colleges and universities.

There is a list of other more specific achievements at the bottom of the page, but I will not spend time describing them. I will quickly wrap up with the last page.

• (1650)

[English]

In short, the current protocol agreements that we have in place ended on March 31 of this year. That was the end of the fourth year. We are well advanced in negotiating the next agreement, which will be for five years. We've pretty much finished, so we're optimistic that we will have the agreement in place. That will set the stage to get discussions going with the various provinces and territories to establish a bilateral agreement. That is the document by which we gain authority to start funding their activities, whether it be for second language learning or minority schools.

I will stop at this point.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gauthier and Mr. Lussier.

Mr. Labelle, you have 3 minutes left.

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Gentlemen, my apologies for my intervention. It had more to do with politics than with administration.

In the agreement protocol, I see that there is a financial commitment for \$1.34 billion over five years. Is that correct?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Gauthier: I think that it is actually over four years.

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: Right.

From 2009 to 2013; that is four years, of course.

In terms of the Roadmap for Linguistic Duality, government announcements mention an investment of \$265 million over five years to support minority-language teaching and \$175 million for second-language teaching.

As you see the figures, are the financial commitments in the Roadmap for Linguistic Duality included in the \$1.34 billion? Or are they additional enhancements that will be added to the \$1.34 billion?

The Roadmap for Linguistic Duality was intended to enhance the Department of Canadian Heritage's commitments to develop linguistic duality. Does the billion dollars include the money allocated by the Roadmap for Linguistic Duality?

Mr. Hubert Lussier: I should first make it clear that the amount of \$265 million that you mentioned will be spent each year for five years and will be invested in education. The amount that the Roadmap for Linguistic Duality provides for education represents about a third of the resources transferred to the provinces for education by the Department of Canadian Heritage.

• (1655)

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: So, if I have it right, one third of the billion dollars comes from the Roadmap for Linguistic Duality.

Were the same amounts allocated in the first Roadmap for Linguistic Duality? Did one third of the amounts allocated come from the Roadmap for Linguistic Duality?

Mr. Hubert Lussier: Yes, it is the same thing.

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: Okay.

A number of witnesses who have come to talk to us about the Roadmap for Linguistic Duality and the protocols have complained about the lack of clarity in the way money moves through the various programs. What can you do to improve that?

This year, at least a dozen witnesses have told us that the process is so unclear that they no longer have any idea where the money comes from and which programs it represents.

How can we get easier access to the information, both parliamentarians and the Canadian public?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Gauthier: One major way to do that could perhaps be to clarify duplications a little. It is true that some initiatives overlap, which complicates things.

However, the annual report on official languages that the department submits has clear annual figures that include everything in what I feel is a simple format. So we avoid comparing roadmap items to each other and having information overlap. The report shows the figures clearly and all in one place.

The Chair: Okay, thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Gourde.

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

My thanks to the witnesses for joining us. Their excellent presentation was quite wide-ranging and really interesting.

You mentioned the next protocol for agreement with the provinces. It seems to be going well. However, one particular topic interests me and that is post-secondary education, more specifically, college-level teaching in the trades.

In teaching a trade, are students able to choose the language in which they learn? For example, can Quebec francophones who are learning a trade do a part of their course in English? We know that, at times, they can go to other provinces to work in some areas. But if they do not have a command of the language, sooner or later, it will become an obstacle.

Mr. Jean-Pierre Gauthier: Actually, post-secondary education is one of the outcome domains established jointly with the provinces. In the coming months, each province will come to see us and we will then be able to discuss the protocol, set the stage for bilateral agreements and engage in dialogue with each of them. In addition, each province will show us what it intends to do in each of the outcome domains, including post-secondary education. That partly stems from the province's overall education plan, be it post-secondary, secondary or other type of education.

We are in talks with the provinces. We have determined that post-secondary education is an outcome domain of common interest, not just for the provinces and territories, but also for us, the federal government. However, the provinces will have to provide us with their objectives and proposals. We are talking with them, trying to encourage them along.

In reality, many things are already in place at the post-secondary level. In addition, several provinces have set their objectives in order to increase the provision of programs as much as possible.

Mr. Hubert Lussier: Mr. Gourde, I would like to add one comment.

As Mr. Gauthier said, there have been many concrete and specific initiatives, especially with Collège Boréal, in northern Ontario. This college has greatly expanded the provision of trades and trade training in French. The Cité collégiale did the same thing in eastern Ontario. In New Brunswick, the New Brunswick Community College in partnership with Quebec's CEGEPs is developing all sorts of new training programs for specific trades that are in demand in those regions.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: You are confirming that the provinces take the leadership, but they are aware of the reality and challenges. Steps have been taken to improve the provision of and access to programs. I am very interested in that.

Another figure also caught my attention. We can see that 53% of current students have an opportunity to learn a second language. Is going over the 50% mark a new trend? Is it an improvement or a drop compared to previous statistics?

Mr. Yvan Déry (Director, Policy and Research, Official Languages Branch, Department of Canadian Heritage): The 53% rate is not new.

You heard what Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil said last week. He talked about the 53% and the 43% or 44%. The 53% includes the students from Quebec. Mr. Corbeil said that the 44% represents the people outside Quebec. That explains the difference.

We have been over the 50% mark for students who take French or English as a second language for some years now. We cannot really achieve 100%. We will never reach 100%, because we must understand that we are talking about students who happen to take French courses in a given year. However, in most provinces, that varies a lot, even in the provinces where French as a second language or English as a second language are mandatory, because that only lasts for a certain number of years during school.

For instance, in Ontario, second language training is mandatory from grade 4 to grade 8. Ontario students must take French as a second language courses. This means that 100% of English-speaking Ontarians will take French courses in school or vice versa for Franco-Ontarians. However, we will never get 100% of students in Ontario taking French courses in the same year. First and second graders are not taking the courses, and twelfth graders are not required to take them.

In short, a 53% rate is meaningful. It is a large percentage, but if we were to calculate the number of students who have an opportunity to learn the other language or to at least get introduced to the other language in school, we are closer to 100% than 53%. We don't have the exact percentage, but we know that French as a second language is mandatory in all the provinces to the east of Manitoba. It is optional in western Canada, but it is still used extensively. All the school boards offer French as a second language courses and, where courses are offered in more than one language, French is chosen by the majority as a second language. The 53% is therefore a meaningful rate, but the real number is even higher if we include all the students who, at some point during their schooling, choose French as a second language.

● (1700)

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Your comment is interesting because, basically, the fact that young people have the opportunity to learn a second language confirms the leadership initiative taken by the provinces that are working on this. However, in the future, it will still be the students' personal choice. These are students who were lucky to be introduced to another language and to continue learning it to hone their skills.

What tools could we give them so that, once they are 14, 15 or 16, they can get through another stage in their learning?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Gauthier: As we mentioned a few moments ago, post-secondary education is definitely an opportunity that the provinces and territories are working on to try to provide a wide range of programs and services. The challenge might be greater when people leave school and enter the workplace or choose their jobs.

The government does not have any specific initiatives to see what is being done with those segments of the population. Intervention is closely linked to education, whether it be secondary or post-secondary.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gourde.

Mr. Hubert Lussier: I would like to quickly talk about another aspect.

In the case of French-immersion students, major efforts have been made—our colleague from Canadian Parents for French can no doubt talk about them—to try to keep students in immersion until they graduate from high school. That is part of the major efforts being made to ensure that the quality of education and the quality of programs are adequate to keep the students until they are finished school.

[English]

The Chair: Merci.

Monsieur Dion.

[Translation]

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much, Mr. Rathon, Mr. Lussier, Mr. Gauthier and Mr. Déry.

On page 4, we see the following two numbers: \$148 million for minority-language education and \$86 million annually for second-language learning.

Can you guarantee that the two envelopes are watertight and that the provinces cannot transfer money from one envelope to the other without people really knowing what is going on?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Gauthier: Every year, we ask the provinces for financial reports. First, they need to provide forecast reports for the coming year and, second, they need to provide actual reports at the end of the year demonstrating that the amounts have been spent according to the conditions of the agreements signed with them.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: That does not seem to be a specific answer. The conditions of the agreements can be very vague.

Mr. Jean-Pierre Gauthier: They provide for...

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Do they guarantee that, when we give \$86 million for second-language training across the country and \$148 million for minority-language education, that is in fact what happens?

• (1705)

Mr. Jean-Pierre Gauthier: That is the case according to the reports we receive from the provinces.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Are you sure that it is true for all the provinces?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Gauthier: Yes.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: What happens with the reports that they are supposed to prepare? Is there a report on the reports? There are a great deal of reports. Is there a report on the reports that parliamentarians can look at? Your annual report is very vague and does not allow me to do that work. So I need something else. The list of reports that you and the provinces must prepare is a long one. I would imagine that someone looks at them and prepares a report.

Mr. Yvan Déry: There is a general report prepared by the Council of Ministers of Education Canada. It deals exclusively with the current program and outlines the achievements, progress and the main measures put forward. That report follows the same schedule as us. The report is now published for the first two...

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Yes, but I am not sure that that is what I want.

I am familiar with that type of report. Usually, everything is rosy and we feel that all is well. I would like to see a report that tracks the money.

I should perhaps let Mr. Rotheron have the floor.

You have heard them. They are very confident that things are clear and so on. But your presentation was significantly less optimistic. How can we reconcile the two perspectives?

Mr. Robert Rotheron: It all depends on the reporting system that each province or territory has.

I can use British Columbia as an example. We must not forget that, under the current agreement, school boards receive 82% to 85% of the funding set out in the agreement. The funds are sent to the school boards, which must prepare a report and submit it to the Ministry of Education. As a best practice, the Ministry posts it on its website for the public to see. That is very good.

We could improve the form itself because it is quite vague. It is not as detailed and elaborate as we might like it to be. Can we really track every dollar or at least have a very good idea? Based on my experience in the field, it depends on the requirements made by the provincial Ministry of Education for its own school boards. I suspect that Ottawa could still ask or encourage the provinces to ask for the accounting.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: That is a nice idea, but do people actually do that? They say they do, but you have pointed out that you cannot keep track of it.

Mr. Robert Rotheron: We cannot keep track as much as we would like to.

Mr. Hubert Lussier: Clearly, it must be understood that we obtain reports that are validated by the provincial authorities and that follow their own accounting rules.

We have a co-operative relationship and we must have faith in what the provinces are telling us. Sometimes, these questions open the door to doubts. Without wanting to open a Pandora's box and uncover a scoop, I think the Commissioner of Official Languages—it is no secret—has looked into the issue on occasion. He won't hold it against me if I say that he is looking into this issue right now. He would certainly be happy to answer your questions if you invite him to speak to the issue.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: The table on page 4 indicates an amount of \$258 million in annual federal contributions and it is all combined.

Are second-language learning and community schools two separate envelopes or one? In Manitoba, you received \$5,540,451. We are counting on you to prepare a report for us indicating how the money has been used.

Mr. Yvan Déry: There is an agreement, two envelopes and six outcome domains per envelope. For each of the six outcome domains, the provinces present initiatives that they want to take, indicators and targets. Of all our agreements, 700 initiatives come from the provinces. There are about 250 indicators and therefore targets as well. Under the action plan, the provinces can make transfers as part of the same language objective. If we see that the creation of new programs for minorities requires less money than anticipated, we can use those funds for something else in the program for minorities.

To make a transfer for the second language or vice versa, we need to be informed and to approve the request. The protocol has defined those transfers. So there is one agreement, but two envelopes being tracked. Financial reports are not prepared for each of the initiatives. The people from Canadian Parents for French would like to find their school board and school. We don't have that type of detailed information, but we have some quite specific numbers on the types of initiatives being funded, according to the language component and the outcome domain. In those categories, the provinces must demonstrate that they are using our money and that they are also investing their own money.

• (1710)

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Many of the groups we hear from do not agree. They say—and it is a clear—that you fund French-language training, but that the provinces are grouping French, Spanish and so on in the same building and that the money from the French-language envelope is actually used for the teaching of several languages. Those are the types of things we hear.

In short, if this committee wants to see things in their proper perspective, which departmental report would make it possible to track the money?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dion.

Mr. Lussier, go ahead.

Mr. Hubert Lussier: The reports prepared by the provinces for us are the ones that best fit what the hon. member is looking for.

The Chair: Could the committee have a copy?

Mr. Hubert Lussier: They could be available if a request is made.

The Chair: Okay.

We are making that request.

[*English*]

If you give them to the clerk, we'll have them distributed to members of the committee.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Are we talking about all the reports?

[*English*]

The Chair: We'll now go to Monsieur Trottier.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Trottier (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank the witnesses for being here today.

I really enjoyed your presentations. I think you gave some very good examples of the variety of challenges, problems, issues and priorities in each province. Every province is unique and, of course, so is their linguistic situation. The provincial partners all have their own approach, which is consistent with the requests and needs of their own citizens.

You said that you are implementing agreements between the federal government and the provinces. However, there has to be some freedom with respect to their innovations and their own programs. The envelope must be fairly fixed. How are the negotiations going?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Gauthier: Once the protocol for agreements is signed, which is imminent, discussions will start by asking the provinces to give us an action plan for the five-year agreement period. We will see the initiatives they are proposing by outcome domain.

Discussions are currently under way on whether we are satisfied with the proposed initiatives, whether they are clear and whether we are in a position to monitor them. We will ensure that the proposed targets are relevant, adequate and measurable, and a discussion will follow from that. We will also be able to voice our preferences. They are on the last page. I went over it, but some of the federal government's preferences are listed on page 11, and we would like to invite the provinces to pay attention to those subjects. One province may not want to review all the initiatives it is proposing for one outcome domain, while another might consider the area of early childhood, for example, or pay greater attention to the post-secondary sector. That is what is discussed with the provinces.

It is clear that, with respect to the province, the education plans submitted to us or the education system are part of the provincial education plan as a whole. Stemming from that, the province has a certain number of constraints and, obviously, a certain number of

objectives in its area of jurisdiction for the entire population. They are also part of a larger framework. That is what we discuss.

Mr. Bernard Trottier: But, when all is said and done, the Department of Canadian Heritage does not impose its plan on the provinces.

Mr. Jean-Pierre Gauthier: No, ultimately, it is a provincial area of jurisdiction. These agreements are reached through mutual discussion.

• (1715)

Mr. Bernard Trottier: This question is for Canadian Parents for French.

If we look at the federal priorities on page 11, intensive learning is listed. A lot of witnesses spoke about the importance of assessing language proficiency. In my opinion, authentic experience is very important, and it goes beyond education, meaning when early childhood partnerships between the school and the community and post-secondary education are involved. Mr. Rothon, do these priorities correspond to your needs and the needs of Canadian Parents for French?

Mr. Robert Rothon: Since I don't have the document in front of me, it is a little hard for me to respond. However, I would say that, in general, we are living with the agreements, the OLEPs, as we have called them for several years. So we have a good understanding of them. That's sort of our frame of reference. Generally, within our network of parents, no one really questions the priorities. In other words, they appear to be managed. There are things we would like to see, but perhaps there hasn't been as much progress as hoped. For example, I'm thinking of

[*English*]

linguistic proficiency outcomes

[*Translation*]

or things like that. It is important to point out that every Canadian parent likes the idea of having national standards.

[*English*]

Sub rosa, that's what you want, or that's what you need.

[*Translation*]

Otherwise, how are you going to evaluate your child's progress? How will you know whether your child has really learned French, what level the child is at and what the child's competency is? Canada's education system does not provide a very easy answer to this.

We are looking for greater stability and greater consistency through OLEPs, while recognizing that some provinces and territories may have other ideas. However, to answer your question, I would say that these priorities are ours as well.

Mr. Bernard Trottier: Are the priorities of the provincial members of Canadian Parents for French different? I don't know, but I imagine that the representatives of Canadian Parents for French from British Columbia send a few requests that are different from those of New Brunswick, for example.

Mr. Robert Rotheron: It all depends, of course, on the consultation process put in place by the province during negotiations with the federal government. However, I must say in passing that every provincial member of Canadian Parents for French wants to be part of the consultation process. We like being identified as partners and as stakeholders that must be consulted by the province during those negotiations or the negotiation process with the province.

Mr. Bernard Trottier: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Trottier.

Mr. Galipeau and Ms. Bateman are next.

Mr. Galipeau, you have the floor.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank the witnesses for being here today and congratulate Mr. Lussier on his promotion. The last time we spoke, he wasn't assistant deputy minister. Congratulations.

I don't think you took Mr. Dion's comments seriously. The problem with the federal government's involvement in second-language learning across Canada, through the provinces, has been around for over 40 years. I remember horror stories from that time. The provinces were very happy to receive federal money, but used it to pave roads, especially during provincial election time.

I'm not aware of similar things now. However, organizations that promote linguistic duality across Canada still have some doubts. They wonder whether federal money, given blithely to the provinces for second-language education, is really being used for its intended purpose.

You also said that the 10 provinces have made reports and that, if we had not seen them, it was because we were not serious enough about looking at them. Did you do a report on those reports? Does an analysis of all the reports exist? If not, do you expect the official languages czar, Mr. Fraser, to do it? Mr. Fraser is not responsible for the money, but you are.

• (1720)

Mr. Hubert Lussier: Mr. Fraser will draft his report based on the information he will get from us, and which the committee can also use to get informed.

As you said, the issue has been around for some time. It is important to keep in mind that, for each dollar the federal government invests through the programs we are talking about today, the provinces invest more. The difficulty is monitoring the path the federal dollar takes. It goes from the ministry of education to the school board to the school and sometimes right to the class, where the investment ends up so that a child can learn the second language. There is a series of steps that ensures that there is a considerable potential for problems in tracking the dollar.

Mr. Royal Galipeau: Should we ask the Auditor General to appear before the committee to answer this question?

Mr. Hubert Lussier: The question was asked in very concrete terms a few years ago when the Auditor General of Canada, after similar concerns were expressed, went to Nova Scotia—where some of the harshest critics are from—to look at how the province was

spending money intended for second-language learning. That was long before my time, but he was satisfied with the exercise.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Galipeau.

Ms. Bateman, you can make some brief comments. You have the floor.

Ms. Joyce Bateman (Winnipeg South Centre, CPC): I would particularly like to thank all the witnesses for the figures and details they have provided and that bring up other issues.

I fully agree with my colleagues, Mr. Dion and Mr. Galipeau, whose comments were very important.

I'm curious. If I've understood correctly, you said on pages 4 and 9 of your document that, for second-language learning, you have spent \$86.2 million annually for immersion programs given to over 2.4 million students. But for minority-language education, you have spent \$148.3 million for about 240,000 kids. It seems to me that that is an extremely different investment. Could you explain that further?

It is a matter of pride for me. I imagine that Mr. Rotheron feels the same as I do in that respect. It is very important to value second-language learning across Canada and I don't think your investment in that regard supports that feeling. Can you provide more detail on that?

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Bateman.

Mr. Gauthier, you have the floor.

Mr. Jean-Pierre Gauthier: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

On the one hand, as Ms. Bateman understood it, the \$86.2 million is actually used for second-language learning. But it is not used just to fund immersion programs; it is also used for second-language learning in its various forms. The amount is offered to the provinces and territories to encourage them to provide that training, but the basic cost for education is obviously still the responsibility of the provinces.

Basically, we are trying to give the provinces money to try to share the additional costs incurred by second-language learning. That is why the amount is modest, but the ripple effect is what we are looking for.

• (1725)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gauthier.

Next is Ms. Michaud, and then Mr. Dubé.

Ms. Éline Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

First, I should say that my question is more for Mr. Lussier and Mr. Gauthier.

You have committed to providing the committee with the biennial reports from the provinces, unless a more complete and detailed document is available. Will you be able to provide us with those documents before Parliament rises at the end of June?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Gauthier: We will prepare the information as soon as we are back in the office. We will send it to the committee through the usual channels.

Ms. Éline Michaud: Thank you very much.

You said that the biennial reports will be sent to the committee because we had asked for them. However, if groups like the FCFA and Canadian Parents for French submit a request, will the reports be sent to them, as well?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Gauthier: The reports are sent by the provinces to the federal government as part of a financial agreement with us. So the information is not necessarily posted publicly or distributed widely. Having said that, a group that tries to get the information could submit a request, which would be reviewed in the same way as an access to information request, which we receive regularly.

Ms. Éline Michaud: Could these groups make the request through the provincial side or through your side?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Gauthier: Yes.

Ms. Éline Michaud: So they could make sure that they actually get the information because, if I understand it correctly, you are subject to certain constraints on your side.

Mr. Jean-Pierre Gauthier: Yes.

Ms. Éline Michaud: Fine.

In the accountability method you use to evaluate the various programs, does the Department of Canadian Heritage recommend that the provinces work with the official language communities and groups, such as Canadian Parents for French, to determine the targets, action plans and indicators to use?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Gauthier: You raise a good point. We should have mentioned it at the outset.

When the provinces are asked to give us their action plan, we strongly encourage them to communicate with the communities and representatives of groups like Canadian Parents for French to discuss what the plan should contain. We also ask the provinces to give us details about their discussions with those groups. Moreover, the agreement we concluded with the provinces and territories contains a clause stipulating that they must take that step.

Ms. Éline Michaud: Mr. Rotheron, were you involved in that approach as part of the last report or in recent discussions with British Columbia?

Mr. Robert Rotheron: Yes, but it is important to point out that this is not always the case with all the provinces. Sometimes, the agreement states that discussion with the parents is necessary, but it does not say which stakeholder represents the parents.

Ms. Éline Michaud: I have one last question before turning things over to my colleague, Mr. Dubé.

You mentioned in your description of the accountability system that the various programs in the initiatives funded by the roadmap undergo regular evaluations and audits.

Could you give a little more detail about how frequently these evaluations and audits are done?

Can the committee and the communities have access to this information, if necessary?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Gauthier: Certainly.

The internal audits, which are risk-based, are established by the chief audit executive. So it is our internal auditor who determines, based on his judgment, where the focus will be within the

department. The frequency is therefore left to the discretion and good judgment of the chief auditor. However, the evaluations are conducted every five years. In addition, an evaluation of official language programs is almost done. It should be published in the next few weeks.

Ms. Éline Michaud: You said that it is regular, but a program might be evaluated only once in the years covered by the agreement. Is that possible?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Gauthier: The program is evaluated cyclically, every five years.

Ms. Éline Michaud: Okay.

Mr. Jean-Pierre Gauthier: Therefore, we will have to evaluate the program again in five years, and so on.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Michaud.

Mr. Dubé, you have the floor.

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Gentlemen, I want to thank you for joining us today.

On page 9 of your presentation, you mention that 2.4 million young Canadians are learning English or French.

Do you know how that figure is broken down? Do you know how many of them are learning English and how many are learning French?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Gauthier: We probably have that information.

Mr. Yvan Déry: Our latest annual report, which covered the 2010-11 period, stated that the number of young people studying French as a second language was 1.7 million and that about 700,000 Quebec francophones were studying English as a second language.

• (1730)

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Thank you.

The Chair: Be brief, Mr. Dubé.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: I will. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

You talk about intensive English in Quebec. In another part of your presentation, you talk about day care centres. Those topics are often the object of political debate in Quebec, in addition to what is happening on the federal level.

Do you simply allocate funds without interfering? How do you manage to let provinces have their own political debates without interfering, while at the same time supporting certain programs?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Gauthier: We work with provinces and territories on those issues. We realize that this is an area of provincial jurisdiction. We do not want to meddle in it.

When it comes to day care centres, our involvement often has to do with coming up with initiatives to add space for a day care centre in a school. That's done according to the province's plans and at its initiative, with our participation.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I want to thank the witnesses for joining us.

There is something I would like to clarify.

[*English*]

Just to clarify, this brief was prepared for our committee, not for the Senate committee. There's simply a typographical error on the cover page. This is new information that they've prepared specifically for our committee. We appreciate that very much.

I thank the department for their briefing as well.

Without further ado, Mr. Galipeau, on a point of order.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Royal Galipeau: Mr. Chair, Ms. Bateman has a question, but she has not had an opportunity to ask it. Could she submit the question to Mr. Lussier through the clerk? That way, he could send the committee a response in due course. Could I have the committee's unanimous consent on that?

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes, certainly, she can do that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Dionne-Labelle?

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: I would like to be sent your decision and the reason behind it.

The Chair: What decision?

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: The decision to refuse the motion I have proposed.

The Chair: First, you have to give me a notice of motion. You didn't do that.

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: We have already submitted that notice.

The Chair: No, Mr. Godin has given me notice of motion. Mr. Chisholm could present the motion because he was acting as Mr. Godin's replacement. That's not your case.

Second, we began our meeting with a reduced quorum, and you cannot present this motion in that context. A quorum is necessary for that. In other words, the majority of committee members have to be present.

[*English*]

Without further ado, this meeting is adjourned.

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