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Chair: Mr. René Arseneault





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• (1105)

[*Translation*]

**The Chair (Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.)):** I call the meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 122 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages.

Before we begin, I'd like to invite everyone around the table to take a look at the little card in front of them, which provides instructions to help us avoid hearing accidents among our interpreters and technicians, because it's very important to look after their hearing health.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(f) and the motion adopted by the committee on April 29, 2024, we will continue our study on the minority language education continuum.

I'd like to welcome the witnesses who are with us for the first hour of the meeting. They are regulars: Mr. Raymond Théberge, Commissioner of Official Languages, Mr. Patrick Wolfe, assistant commissioner, compliance and enforcement branch, and Mr. Pierre Leduc, assistant commissioner, strategic direction and external relations branch.

Welcome back to the committee, gentlemen. I see you have a team with you, so welcome to everyone.

Commissioner, as you know, I'm strict with regard to time, which allows the various political parties to ask many more questions. So you have a firm five minutes for your opening statement.

[*English*]

**Mr. Raymond Théberge (Commissioner of Official Languages, Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages):** Thank you.

Mr. Chair and honourable members of the committee, good morning.

[*Translation*]

Before I begin, I'd like to acknowledge that we are on land that is part of the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe nation, an Ottawa Valley aboriginal people.

Since I took office in 2018, I've said repeatedly that education is a community's most powerful tool for ensuring the vitality of its language and culture. A strong education continuum is essential for official language minority communities, or OLMCs, in Canada.

Their vitality depends on the opportunity to learn the official language of the minority, from early childhood to adulthood. Minority learning institutions create spaces where speakers can thrive in the minority language, and immersion programs allow people to learn French while standardizing its use in a public place, which is to say, the classroom. Furthermore, I'd like to point out that on October 9, I published a report entitled, "A shared future: A closer look at our official language minority communities." It highlights several challenges faced by OLMCs, including the learning continuum.

[*English*]

At the very root of the continuum challenge is the question of funding. Many learning sectors are suffering from a chronic lack of long-term funding, especially those that serve OLMCs. This situation makes it difficult to ensure the right to minority language education, which is protected by section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Furthermore, the post-secondary sector needs stable and sufficient government funding to ensure that it can function effectively and that the infrastructure is in place to meet the needs of OLMCs.

The "Action Plan for Official Languages 2023-2028" is an important means of providing core funding and project funding to these sectors. It should serve to better meet the needs identified by OLMC stakeholders. However, despite the action plan's increase in funding, I've noted that some of the recommendations I made in the last year of the previous action plan, 2018-2023, have not been implemented, including the recommendation to ensure rapid deployment of initiatives as soon as the next plan was launched.

In addition to stable funding, another way of ensuring a seamless continuum is greater co-operation between the Government of Canada and the provinces and territories. We need to continue to emphasize the importance of including language clauses in federal-provincial-territorial agreements—clauses that contain specific, transparent and accountability mechanisms that will produce tangible, measurable and lasting results. I also encourage the federal government to clarify how, through the regulations it is developing, it will honour its commitment under part VII of the Official Languages Act to ensure that "members of English and French [OLMCs have opportunities] to pursue quality learning in their own language throughout their lives".

[Translation]

In my opinion, educational experiences should be equivalent across the country, both in the linguistic majority's schools and those of the linguistic minority. This includes recognition of the linguistic minority's right to manage their schools. I insist that governments recognize this need.

For a variety of reasons, we find that children stop studying in the minority language at various stages of the continuum. It would be important to better identify the timing and causes of this enrolment loss, using evidence-based data. That data would allow governments and stakeholders to target their recruitment and retention efforts more effectively.

[English]

This past September, I attended the CARE conference in Montreal, and one of its goals is to strengthen the vital link between the education committee and the English-speaking communities. I encourage the latter to continue their efforts to engage with the provincial government and advocate for their rights. English-speaking communities in Quebec are committed to protecting and promoting the French language. In fact, the public French immersion programs they've established have consistently proven their worth in advancing the equality of both of Canada's official languages. This is reflected in the high rate of bilingualism among English-speaking Quebecers.

[Translation]

In closing, I hope that these elements will help you reflect on the learning continuum, which is crucial to the vitality of official language minority communities.

I will be pleased to answer your questions in the language of your choice.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Commissioner.

The first round of questions and answers will be six minutes per party. We will begin with the first chair of the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor for six minutes.

**Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC):** Mr. Chair, I'm the first vice-chair of the committee, but I thank you nonetheless; it may be premonitory.

Mr. Théberge, Mr. Wolfe and Mr. Leduc, thank you for being here. We are always pleased to welcome you to the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

Commissioner, in your October 2024 report, you state that “[t]he 2021 Census provided much-needed evidence on rights holders”. A few lines later, things get worse. You encourage “Statistics Canada to continue to expand its analyses in this area ... The modernized Act commits the government to restoring the demographic weight of the Francophone minority through immigration, but the government must also ensure that new generations are not lost to assimilation through majority language schools.” You conclude by saying that you are “pleased that the modernization of the Act includes the federal government's commitment to periodically estimate the number of children of rights holders.”

You know that I fought the battle between “counting” and “estimating.” My question is simple. How can we be happy with a simple estimate in the next census, instead of an enumeration?

**Mr. Raymond Théberge:** If we could count all the individuals, that would probably be ideal, in my opinion. Having an estimate still allows us to better know where the rights holders are located, which is extremely important. Over the past 20 or 30 years, there have been migrations across Canada. There are places where there were no francophones 20 years ago, but where they can be found today. It's therefore extremely important to give access to schools where rights holders are. The lack of access to those schools leads to assimilation, because there's a break in the continuum. Young people leave schools at some point during their apprenticeship.

• (1110)

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Thank you. I understand what you're saying, but you're praising the battle that was waged by the committee with respect to enumeration in the 2021 census, while being satisfied that the government is on the right track. I think that could have been reinforced.

You talked about accessibility to schools. In your experience, if a French-language school is built in an official language minority community, what is the impact on the community?

**Mr. Raymond Théberge:** First, the school will fill up.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Are you sure?

**Mr. Raymond Théberge:** Yes. It's to the point where you almost immediately start building portable classrooms, because there already isn't enough room in the school. If a community welcomes a francophone school for the first time, it becomes a gathering place. We're talking about the community side of these schools. The school becomes a space where community members can interact, socialize and participate in activities in their mother tongue. Schools are at the heart of communities. For over 50 years, we've been working to create these schools in the communities. They become a focal point for the community.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Once again, there isn't a lack of clientele, but a lack of infrastructure. We need to speed up the process in order to save French in official language minority communities outside Quebec.

**Mr. Raymond Théberge:** Absolutely. There's a shortage of schools and facilities in every province. If we don't have enough high schools, young people will opt for an institution closer to them. We need only look at what's happening in British Columbia, for example, where the Supreme Court has rendered a decision. There's a crying need for new schools. I'd say that's the case in almost every province.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** In the same report, you mention your intervention in the Commission scolaire francophone des Territoires du Nord-Ouest v. Northwest Territories (Education, Culture and Employment). You say that in its decision, “the Supreme Court set aside ministerial decisions refusing to admit children of non-rights-holder parents to French-language schools in the Northwest Territories. According to the Supreme Court, the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment should have considered the values of section 23 of the Charter in exercising her discretion.”

What are the positive and negative consequences of that decision?

**Mr. Raymond Thériège:** The positive consequences include increasing school enrolment, which makes it possible to provide more services.

In one of the areas where contact between the two communities is quite intense—such as Yellowknife, which isn't a huge community—we see that this leads to positive interactions among young people from both communities. This has a positive impact on learning French. So French is more present.

Of course, the danger is the effect of English on young people. In a minority language environment, it's always important to devote as much time as possible to the minority language in the classroom.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Would you say that other levels of government don't show the same willingness to give greater prominence to the second official language in official language minority communities?

**Mr. Raymond Thériège:** It may not be a priority for some governments. In the past, we very often had to go before the courts to move the education file forward, particularly to ask for the building of schools, among other things.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Commissioner.

Mr. Joël Lightbound, you have the floor for six minutes.

• (1115)

**Mr. Joël Lightbound (Louis-Hébert, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Commissioner, thank you for being here with your team. I'll continue along the same lines as my colleague Joël Godin.

You talked about the lack of physical and human infrastructure. We know that there's also a shortage of francophone teachers and early childhood educators in places where French is the minority language. You've travelled across the country and have been studying this issue for at least seven years now, if not longer, given your previous background.

In what part of Canada is the continuum of minority-language education being successfully pursued? Can you think of an example of a province where there is local involvement and where children start their education in French at an early age and continue it in that language, an example that could serve as a model to be replicated elsewhere in the country?

**Mr. Raymond Thériège:** I think we have to be careful when we talk about a better model, because our communities are so different from each other.

For example, in New Brunswick, about one third of the population is francophone and Acadian. So there is a critical mass, not only in elementary and secondary schools, but, of course, at the Université de Moncton. So that allows for a continuum in education. However, there are still some early childhood challenges.

As for Ontario, it managed to expand its 12 school boards thanks to the language planning policy it adopted several years ago. There are many lessons to be learned from that province in terms of language adjustments at the elementary and secondary levels. It's often more difficult at the post-secondary level, where a certain critical mass is often required. Too few programs will be offered if there aren't enough students. We then get into a vicious circle.

Personally, I think it's important that the education continuum be adapted to each province's situation. In Manitoba, francophones represent 2% of the population. Clearly, the situation is different. However, the Division scolaire franco-manitobaine does excellent work in elementary and secondary schools.

The education continuum in Quebec's English-speaking community seems to have some barriers, but there is a network of primary and secondary schools and, of course, universities and CEGEPs. These include Concordia University, McGill University and Dawson College.

I think we have to develop a model that applies to each community. Things are different in New Brunswick than they are in British Columbia or Alberta. The ideal model would be one where, as soon as a French-speaking baby from Quebec leaves the hospital, he'd have a place in a French-language day care and then be able to continue his studies in French in the education system. It would be the same thing for an anglophone baby in Quebec. However, the reality is that there are gaps throughout the education continuum, whether it be at the early childhood, primary or secondary levels. Even where there are universities, they don't offer a full range of programs.

In Ontario, there's a lot of talk about universities being mainly bilingual. But we have the Université de Hearst and the Université de l'Ontario français. However, the idea of by and for francophones often comes up.

The issue of the education continuum is extremely complex. We could put it on paper, but I don't think there's a province or territory that meets all the criteria.

**Mr. Joël Lightbound:** I understand. Also, everything is so connected. You say that we don't have the critical mass for post-secondary education, but that also comes from early childhood. In order to have that mass, access must be available so that we don't lose those francophones.

We heard from Professor Pierre Foucher, who spoke to us about section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. In a way, that section gives us a basis for examining the continuum in education, but it doesn't apply to early childhood or post-secondary education. Professor Foucher told us that there was the expansion provided by the decision on the Northwest Territories, which Joël Godin referred to, but he saw a possibility of broadening the interpretation of this clause to include early childhood and post-secondary education.

Is that something you see or would like to see? Do you have any comments?

**Mr. Raymond Th  berge:** I would obviously like section 23 to apply to post-secondary education and early childhood. I think this issue will eventually end up before the courts. In Alberta, right now, in the case of the Facult   Saint-Jean, the community is going to court, but can't argue that section 23 applies to post-secondary education. I'm not a constitutional expert, so I'm not really in a position to comment on that, but I know that it would be quite a victory for communities to have another part of the continuum now covered by section 23. I think that historically, we have focused a lot on primary and secondary education. I'm of the same generation as Mr. Samson, where the—

• (1120)

**Mr. Jo  l Godin:** You are younger than Mr. Samson.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Raymond Th  berge:** I don't know. Let's say that those were the days when French-language schools didn't even exist. So, at first, we focused on elementary and secondary schools. Now, we see that this isn't enough, because if facilities are not available at each stage of the continuum, young people decide to go elsewhere.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Commissioner.

Thank you, Mr. Lightbound.

I now yield the floor to the second vice-chair of this committee, Mr. Beaulieu, for six minutes.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'  le, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome to the people from the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages.

Commissioner, in your last report, "A shared future: A closer look at our official language minority communities," you completely ignored the asymmetrical approach in the new Official Languages Act, which states francophones are a minority across Canada and that French is threatened in Quebec, not English. For example, you say that you support the English-speaking community with respect to new laws designed to somewhat limit funding for English-speaking institutions, in order to achieve equitable funding between French and English-speaking institutions in Quebec.

How do you take this new approach into account?

**Mr. Raymond Th  berge:** Clearly, when we talk about asymmetry, that applies in large part in the context of part VII of the Official Languages Act, for which we don't yet have the necessary implementing regulations. I think, however, that part VII also states

that we recognize that there are two official language communities in Canada. It makes that clear, and it's clearly stated in other parts of the act as well. It also recognizes this asymmetry. You're absolutely right.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** Part VII also states that there must be measures to support French in Quebec.

**Mr. Raymond Th  berge:** Yes, I completely agree, but that doesn't mean that we cannot have measures to support the other community. One doesn't preclude the other.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** I'll just give you an example. Currently, in the funding provided by the Government of Quebec to CEGEPs, the percentage paid to anglophone institutions is twice as high as the proportion of anglophones in the population. You fully agree with that and you are opposed to the Government of Quebec correcting this situation.

**Mr. Raymond Th  berge:** What I perhaps oppose is a lack of consultation with the community and the way it was imposed. I was reading the report by Mr. Dubreuil, Quebec's French language commissioner, who talks about increasing the percentage of French-language education at the post-secondary level. However, he recommends that this be done gradually, in consultation and in partnership with post-secondary institutions. I think there should be—

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** However, he also proposes to further cap the number of spaces in anglophone CEGEPs.

Ultimately, I think you're going back to myths that are propagated by certain anglophone lobby groups. In particular, you say that one of the main challenges facing the anglophone minority in Quebec is the perception that it does not subscribe to the value of the French language as a common language. However, you recognize the Quebec Community Groups Network, or QCGN, somewhat as the flagship, the representative of the anglophone community in Quebec.

In committee, during the clause-by-clause study of the new Official Languages Act, the QCGN was pleased that a Bloc Qu  b  cois proposal to include the concept of French as a common language in the new act was defeated. Furthermore, it states in one of its blog posts that, "the QCGN has never endorsed the idea of a common language. In fact, we have been very circumspect about the idea and its link to ethno-linguistic nationalism." Then it goes on with mudslinging. Do you agree with that?

**Mr. Raymond Th  berge:** I'm not talking about the QCGN. We conducted a study with the Quebec public on the perception of the two communities, and it is clear that what people think is not necessarily expressed by certain representatives. It's important to remember that anglophones in Quebec want to be part of Quebec society and contribute to it. Our study showed very clearly that there are sometimes areas of agreement—

• (1125)

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** That's easy to say, as the federal government, under part VII of the Official Languages Act, supports the QCGN and probably recognizes it as the representative of Quebec anglophones. However, that organization opposes the notion of French as a common language and has spread a lot of misinformation, which you are repeating, particularly about access to health care. However, Bill 96 does not affect access to health care. In Montreal, francophones have trouble getting health care in French. So I think there's a real bias.

You also repeated the cliché that anglophones are poorer than francophones, and that's a massive generalization. You've already made that statement here, and I asked you to send me the data. The data indicated that the incomes of the two groups were more or less equal, but you based your statement on the first official language spoken and the median. However, when we take language of work into account, we see that people who work in English in Quebec earn about \$15,000 more. The indicators that define the historical anglophone community the most show that it is still very high up in the ranks.

In doing so, why do you think you're improving the situation of French in Quebec?

**Mr. Raymond Thériège:** As Commissioner of Official Languages, I am here to defend both official language minority communities. Of course, the situation of francophones outside Quebec is different from that of the anglophone community in Quebec. The differences are significant. Those communities are not the same. The francophone community is scattered across the nine provinces—

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** Do you not take into account the fact that French is threatened in Quebec?

**Mr. Raymond Thériège:** Yes, absolutely, we take it into account, but it's not by taking away someone else's rights that we're going to advance someone else's rights.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** Do you think it's a right to anglicize newcomers?

**Mr. Raymond Thériège:** It's not a right—

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu. Your time is up.

Thank you, Commissioner.

[English]

Mr. Cannings, the floor is yours for six minutes.

**Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP):** Thank you very much.

To the witnesses, thank you for being here today.

We're talking about the continuum of minority language education services. I think Mr. Lightbound spoke to this. I'd like to continue that about the earliest part of that education in child care situations—preschool, if you will

I know that my colleague Leah Gazan, the MP for Winnipeg Centre, introduced an amendment to Bill C-35 that supported the availability of minority language child care across Canada. If you're

a francophone family in Manitoba or British Columbia, it would be good to have child care available in French, for instance.

I'm just wondering if you could further comment on that and what that provision in Bill C-35 might mean to that situation.

**Mr. Raymond Thériège:** It means a lot in the sense in that, the earlier one starts learning in his or her first language, the greater the chance of their continuing their education in that language.

The issue we have when it comes to early learning is, one, a lack of spaces, and, two, a lack of staff to be able to provide the services.

It is key. In many provinces, we have what we call *l'exogamie*. I don't know how you say it in English—exogamy. We have numerous couples who are linguistically mixed. The children need access to these supports early on.

I think what's being put forward is crucial to the linguistic vitality of these communities. We have to find ways to staff them. We need more spaces. We just don't have enough spaces.

In 2026, I think we will be renewing it—not the action plan but the program. I think we have to dramatically increase the number of spaces available. Without them, we will lose a significant number of potential students entering our schools.

• (1130)

**Mr. Richard Cannings:** Education, as we all know, is a provincial matter. I'm not a regular member of this committee, so I may not know the intricacies of how the federal mandate impinges on that.

How can the federal government make sure we have enough teachers and staff for these positions within schools?

In British Columbia, my kids went through French immersion. However, it was late immersion, because we don't have the staff or facilities to do full immersion if you're not a francophone family in British Columbia.

How can we make sure we have those positions available for francophones across Canada, and for anglophones in Quebec?

**Mr. Raymond Thériège:** There are a number of initiatives that have been launched to try to increase the number of French-language teachers across the country. There's been funding sent directly to post-secondary institutions—faculties of education. There's also a program where we established what we call an “immigration corridor” for teaching professionals. We ensure they have certain qualifications and can quickly become part of the system. There are issues around that.

I also think we have to be mindful that teaching, as a profession, is not what it used to be. It's not as valued as it used to be. We can't recruit teachers in majority-language schools, let alone minority-language schools. There seems to be an issue. As a former dean of education, I know we used to have no problem filling our classrooms. There is something out there happening in the schools. People are saying, "This no longer interests me as a career."

We did a study in 2019, dealing only with FSL teachers and the lack of them. It was blatant. We had people in classrooms who were not qualified. In many provinces today, in majority-language schools, we have teachers who are not qualified. We have to find better pathways. In the 1960s, we had a program whereby... I went to school in the sixties, so we're the boomers.

**Mr. Richard Cannings:** I am, too.

**Mr. Raymond Th  berge:** We had to find many teachers, so we accelerated training programs. We were innovative. I don't think you're going to meet the needs of classrooms with five- or six-year teacher training programs. We have to be more innovative. We have to access other ways of doing it. We have to speed up training and those kinds of things.

It's a very complex issue, because it's not only schools. It's also early learning. In rural areas, it's even more difficult. The federal government, when it comes to minority-language education writ large, has programs in place to try to support this, but we have to find the candidates. We have to find people to be part of those programs.

**The Chair:** Thanks, Mr. Cannings.

Thanks, Mr. Th  berge.

[*Translation*]

We are starting a new round of questions.

Mr. Dalton, you have the floor for five minutes.

**Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Th  berge, thank you for your vigilance when it comes to official languages.

Earlier, Mr. Cannings talked a bit about the teacher shortage. You talked about immigrant certification. It is very difficult for immigrants to enter health care professions, in particular. You said there were problems in that regard.

Can you tell us more about the problem related to qualifications for becoming a teacher? Are the eligibility criteria too stringent or not stringent enough? What is the problem?

• (1135)

**Mr. Raymond Th  berge:** When I was at the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, there was a lot of talk about the recognition of prior learning and qualifications. They even said they were going to make sure that any qualified person would be able to get into a classroom. On the one hand, there is often opposition from professional bodies as to who should be admitted to the profession. On the other hand, there are people who come from abroad to teach.

However, it would be important for these people to receive training on the context in which they are going to find themselves and work. For example, if you come from France and settle in Ponteix, Saskatchewan, the environment is not the same; the context is different. It's also important to understand that the pedagogical approaches used in Canada are not necessarily the same everywhere. It's a matter of adaptation. So we have to give those people the tools to succeed. Without the proper tools, they won't succeed in the classroom.

Just because you're a teacher in one country doesn't mean you can automatically transfer your knowledge to another. The teacher always needs to understand the cultural aspect of their classroom. You know as well as I do that, in today's classrooms, there are a lot of different needs, not to mention neurodiversity. We have to be aware of all that, which requires some training. The community that welcomes teachers from immigrant backgrounds must be made aware of this.

**Mr. Marc Dalton:** We are actually seeing a major change in the Canadian population, which is becoming increasingly multicultural, and that is a positive change.

Millions of immigrants arrive in Canada, many of whom already speak French. Studies have been done on the decline of French in Canada. Could you talk about immigration and the demographic shift that's happening in Canada? Of course, we welcome immigrants from countries where French is spoken, but the proportion of those types of immigrants is not what it used to be. Can you talk about the vitality of French outside Quebec, in particular? You can also talk about French in Quebec if you want to.

**Mr. Raymond Th  berge:** I can refer to part VII of the Official Languages Act, which talks about the desire to restore the proportion of francophones outside Quebec to 6.1%, which is what it used to be. To do that, the preferred tool is immigration. However, from 2003-04 to about 2022-23, the government met its target only once, in the last year of the program.

It's all well and good to set a target of 7%, 8%, 9% or 10% of francophones outside Quebec, or even more, but for that to happen, all the necessary elements and structures must really be in place to support those people.

When you're an immigrant, your situation is very complex. You leave one country and arrive in another country with a host society. Programs must be put in place to ensure that those people have a job, housing and access to education. It's not enough to recruit a number of people who speak French or English. All the necessary support has to be put in place for those people.

In francophone minority communities, it is even more important to ensure employability, housing, access to education and so on for those people, as otherwise they will leave for the larger centres. So that is extremely important.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Commissioner and Mr. Dalton.



Ms. Koutrakis, the floor is yours. You have five minutes.

**Ms. Annie Koutrakis (Vimy, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Théberge, I will be sharing my time with my colleague Darrell Samson. This means I have two and a half minutes, because the chair is quite strict about speaking time.

The Government of Canada has signed education agreements with provincial and territorial governments. These agreements have a direct impact on the operation of francophone school boards. Do you think the provinces and territories are doing enough for minority-language education? If not, how could they do better?

**Mr. Raymond Théberge:** The answer is that it's always possible to do more. That said, the provinces and territories have developed a habit when it comes to minority education, which is to go back to the federal government to ask for more funding. There is no doubt that francophone education in minority communities results in additional costs. However, the federal government's role is to cover incremental costs. So it's not a matter of paying the costs of recruiting teachers, for example. That's not an additional cost. It's vital that the provinces and territories recognize their role. Education falls under their jurisdiction, so their contribution must go beyond core funding.

Earlier, I talked about what Ontario did a few years ago with respect to its language planning policy. It has made significant investments in education, and I think all governments should be investing in their communities.

• (1140)

**Ms. Annie Koutrakis:** Thank you.

**Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.):** I would like to thank Mr. Théberge and his team for being here. I don't have a lot of time, so I'm going to ask you to be brief in your answers.

First, however, I wanted to say that the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial in Nova Scotia serves as a model because it was the first to implement a school readiness program aimed at four-year-old children.

That said, here is the fundamental question: Is education in French a right or a privilege?

**Mr. Raymond Théberge:** It's a right.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Can a right be infringed upon or expanded?

**Mr. Raymond Théberge:** You can do both.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** That's correct.

So, as far as section 23 is concerned, does the continuum expand or remove that right?

**Mr. Raymond Théberge:** Can you clarify your question?

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Could mentioning the education continuum, i.e., from preschool to post-secondary, in Bill C-13 broaden the scope of section 23 of the charter?

**Mr. Raymond Théberge:** It could broaden the scope of section 23.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Okay.

Has recognizing the right to school management given francophone communities more rights, or has it taken away any rights?

**Mr. Raymond Théberge:** It gave them more rights.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Okay.

Now I'm going to ask more specific questions.

If francophones don't have access to education in French, are their rights being violated?

**Mr. Raymond Théberge:** Yes.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Okay.

If they don't have the necessary infrastructure, are their rights being infringed upon?

**Mr. Raymond Théberge:** Absolutely.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** If they don't have funding, are their rights being infringed upon?

**Mr. Raymond Théberge:** Absolutely.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** If there are no language clauses in the agreements, are the rights of the francophone minority being violated?

**Mr. Raymond Théberge:** Absolutely.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Can you lose your status as a rights holder? The answer is yes, after three generations.

**Mr. Raymond Théberge:** Indeed.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** I'm getting to my main question.

Are francophones' rights being violated by the fact that there is no infrastructure, that there is no access, that there is not enough money and that there are no language agreements that must be upheld by the provinces? If so, shouldn't that be challenged in court?

**Mr. Raymond Théberge:** This has already been challenged in the courts on a number of occasions. In fact, many of the advances that have been made in recent decades have been as a result of court decisions that have strengthened rights to education. Before the Mahé decision in 1990, nothing was happening. Today, we have a system in place. I remember when there were no francophone students in the francophone schools, because the francophone schools did not exist. There are now 150,000 students in francophone schools outside Quebec. So there is growth.

However, we can never be satisfied with the status quo in terms of linguistic minority rights, because sticking to the status quo would lead to a setback. Part VII of the Official Languages Act talks about vitality, not just keeping a certain status quo. We want communities to flourish, to be stronger, healthier and more dynamic. That will always require investment, because the context in which we live is constantly changing.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** I will conclude by saying that the right of communities to manage their educational institutions and their right to funding are, in my opinion, at issue. So our rights are still being violated today.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Samson.

Mr. Beaulieu, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** In Quebec, the number of seats in anglophone CEGEPs and anglophone universities exceeds the proportion of anglophones in the population. We can always accept that anglophones have the right to access anglophone institutions. However, is it a right that there are spaces in those institutions for allophones and francophones?

• (1145)

**Mr. Raymond Th  berge:** I think the question of who has access to CEGEPs in Quebec is beyond my remit.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** In that case, you should not have waded in on the issue. I think that, by intervening the way you did, you interfered in an area that falls under Quebec's jurisdiction. Don't you agree?

**Mr. Raymond Th  berge:** No.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** So, in your opinion, you have the right to interfere. You have the right to take a stand, not for the rights of anglophones, but to maintain their ability to anglicize francophones and allophones.

**Mr. Raymond Th  berge:** I think that the rights related to the education continuum apply to both official language minority communities.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** Absolutely, but those rights are already upheld in Quebec. Quebec is the only province where the official language minority community has enough spaces. That's the case in every region of Quebec. However, my question is the following: Should there be so many spaces that, in the end, francophones and allophones are anglicized?

A Statistics Canada study has shown that when you attend a CEGEP or university offering courses in one language, the higher the chances that you will work in that same language. Do you think that's true? Are those results valid?

**Mr. Raymond Th  berge:** That's certainly a possibility.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** That's right.

However, if it is valid, and if we continue to ensure that there are twice as many spaces at anglophone CEGEPs and three times as many spaces at anglophone universities, we are contributing to the anglicization of Quebec.

**Mr. Raymond Th  berge:** Spaces have been capped.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** Yes, but it was that cap that you were critical of. You said that you shared the concerns of the anglophone community about this cap and the increase in tuition fees.

**Mr. Raymond Th  berge:** Very often, we don't know what the consequences of this kind of measure will be. The community has a right to be concerned.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** However, I think that, by interfering in this matter and saying that you shared the community's concerns and that you were defending its rights, you did not help to solve the problem. Instead, you made the problem bigger.

**Mr. Raymond Th  berge:** We certainly don't have the same definition of the word "interference".

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** Quite.

For example—

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu. Two and a half minutes go by quickly.

[English]

Mr. Cannings, the floor is yours for two and a half minutes.

**Mr. Richard Cannings:** Thank you.

I'd like to switch from one end of the continuum to the other, going from early child care situations to postgraduate work in universities and colleges. We've done a study in the science and research committee on how difficult it is for francophone researchers to publish in French, and that is because of things outside the control of this or any government, because English has become the *lingua franca*, to use that term, of world science and research.

I'm just wondering if your office has been doing anything to work on that issue. How can we still encourage francophone graduate students in their studies and in their research when so much of what is published almost has to be in English to have some effect? Can you comment on that?

**Mr. Raymond Th  berge:** First, I think we have to be mindful of the research ecosystem, where, basically, the number of publications is controlled by a very few publishing houses. If you want to be an associate professor, an assistant professor and then a full professor, you have to publish. Very often, those journals are in English.

We have received, in the past, some complaints dealing with funding of research proposals, particularly in French. In the past, the funding councils had specific programs for francophone communities. They no longer exist, as far as I know, and Canadian Heritage has put in place an expert panel to look at how we could encourage more research in French, more publications in French. It's quite a challenge, given the ecosystem where, basically, it doesn't matter what your first language is, because you will publish in that second language.

I do think that we could, for example, tie publications that are funded by Canadian funding agencies to having to produce your text in both official languages. That would be a start. I don't know if it's possible, but...

• (1150)

**The Chair:** Time is very short. I'm giving plus or minus 10 seconds to everyone.

We have time for a quick, let's say, two minutes for the Conservatives.

[Translation]

Mr. Godin, over to you.

**Mr. Jo  l Godin:** I'll be sharing my time, Mr. Chair.

Commissioner, you determined that there was a shortage of francophone teachers, which is a problem. Would one of the keys to the solution be bringing in foreign francophone teachers? That way, we could kill two birds with one stone: We would increase francophone immigration and we could offer French-language education.

**Mr. Raymond Th  berge:** A pathway has been set up for teachers. That said, as I told Mr. Dalton, it's not just a matter of recruiting teachers from another country and assigning them a class here. There has to be a transition period and support, among other things.

I think it's important to remember that this is certainly part of the solution. However, we have to provide these people with supports, because—

**Mr. Jo  l Godin:** If I may interrupt you, with all due respect, Commissioner, if it's done properly, it may be a short-term solution, but it would solve two problems for the Canadian francophone: the teacher shortage and immigration.

**Mr. Raymond Th  berge:** It would be a win-win, yes.

**Mr. Jo  l Godin:** Okay. Thank you, Commissioner.

Mr. Chair, I'm going to give the rest of my time to my colleague Ms. Gladu.

**The Chair:** Ms. Gladu, you have the floor.

**Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

Mr. Th  berge, you said that you had made recommendations to the government, but that no action had been taken. Can you send your list of recommendations to the clerk?

[*English*]

We're studying the continuum as well. We see that in day care there's a gap in providing francophone education. Also, in the primary system, we know that French immersion is doing fairly well in smaller communities, but we did hear that there's a big gap in the large cities.

Also, in the rural areas, there are just not enough minority rights schools, and I think you made that point. It gets worse as you go towards post-secondary.

What other gaps do you see, and what do you see as solutions for us to fix that?

**Mr. Raymond Th  berge:** One of the gaps is the programming that's available at various points on the continuum.

I'll use Toronto as an example. After grade 8, 25% of the kids will change systems, because they know full well that in Toronto, if you want to access post-secondary, it's basically U of T or Toronto Metropolitan University, and now there's the Universit   de l'Ontario fran  ais.

They think in terms of "where can I go for post-secondary?" There are gaps there. In other words, there's not enough post-secondary programming. That is an issue in many of the provinces.

Also, when you go into rural areas, the choice of programs in secondary school is not what it is in some of the larger centres. There again, people will leave the system.

When you go right to the beginning of the system, in terms of child care, if there are not enough child care spaces for the minorities, the kids will go to anglophone day care, and often they don't end up going to the French school.

There are gaps everywhere in the system. Programming is a big one, because the more programs you have, the more students you have, but it becomes a vicious circle.

**Ms. Marilyn Gladu:** In terms of section 23, it's not very clear there that it should include day care and it should include post-secondary. It's also not clear what is a sufficient number to justify it. Do you think it would be helpful to clarify something there, so that people couldn't neglect their responsibilities because it's vague?

• (1155)

**Mr. Raymond Th  berge:** I think that on the jurisprudence around section 23, basically, you have to have a very liberal interpretation. People have been advocating for quite some time now, in terms of specifically post-secondary, that it should be covered by section 23. Now, in the last while, we talk more about early childhood. Ideally, section 23 would cover all the bases. It would cover the continuum.

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Gladu.

Mr. Samson, you have the floor for five minutes.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Mr. Th  berge, earlier I talked about the loss of status as a rights holder. I don't want that kind of loss to happen. I raised the issue to tell the minister that this kind of loss must not be allowed. If we lose three generations, the status of rights holders is indirectly lost. Regulations could be put in place to allow for an exception to stop the loss of rights holders. That would be something to think about, because, once again, our rights are violated when our students leave some schools in grades 7 or 8 because the services offered aren't up to snuff.

I have an important question for you about your report. You conclude by referring to the Statistics Canada survey, which talks about the number of students needed to justify offering services and compares the actual number to the potential number. Can you give us more details on the significance of those numbers? In your report, you seem very excited about the survey.

**Mr. Raymond Th  berge:** I don't know if I'm excited about the Statistics Canada survey, but let's say that—

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** I was talking about the results, not Statistics Canada.

**Mr. Raymond Th  berge:** If we want to ensure that we can put in place the necessary infrastructure to meet the needs of the communities, then we need to know where the rights holders are. In my opinion, we also need to better understand the migration models of the communities, as well as their demographic evolution and ethno-linguistic profile. Communities are changing rapidly. I don't think the ones we knew as young people necessarily exist today. We have to be aware of this new reality and adapt to it.

Very often, when I was responsible for building schools, I was asked where the rights holders were. That was always the fundamental question. This post-censal survey gave us a lot of information on the communities, but also on where they are, how they are changing and how to better meet their needs going forward. That's what good data gives us.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** If rights holders and francophones don't have access to French-language education or services and there's no funding to offer them, aren't we assimilating them in Canada?

**Mr. Raymond Th  berge:** We talk a lot about immigration when it comes to ensuring the vitality of communities, but we also have to stop assimilation, what we also call language transfers, among other things. However, the lack of access to education in the minority language will certainly contribute to assimilation.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** With regard to the expansion of section 23 of the charter, I find that the Supreme Court decision in the case involving the Northwest Territories gives some special ammunition to lawyers who will challenge such decisions in the future. I am referring to the weight given to the vitality of the community. What's your take on this?

**Mr. Raymond Th  berge:** This decision shows that the community sees itself in a certain way. They see themselves as inclusive and as being in the best position to decide who should enrol in their schools. You know as well as I do that all school boards have their own policy on admission to minority schools.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Thank you.

Since you are coming to the end of your mandate, I would like to ask you a question. If I gave you a magic wand and you could do one thing to advance the francophonie and French-language education in Canada, a key aspect of our society, what would you do?

• (1200)

**Mr. Raymond Th  berge:** If I had a magic wand, I would broaden the scope of section 23 so that it applies to the entire education continuum.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** From cradle to grave.

**Mr. Raymond Th  berge:** That's correct.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** We are surprised to see you stop 30 seconds before the end of your speaking time, Mr. Samson.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** I didn't realize I had 30 seconds left.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the commissioner for his work, his dedication, his vision and the energy he has devoted to French-language education in Canada, not only in his role as Commissioner, but since his youth. He faced enormous challenges and was able not only to overcome those barriers, but also to influence the changes made to French-language education in Canada.

Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Samson, for your wise words.

Commissioner, this is probably your last visit to our committee. I won't repeat what Mr. Samson just said, but I would like to thank you on behalf of all committee members. You've made a good impression every time you've been here. You've got a fantastic team helping you, obviously.

On behalf of the entire Canadian francophonie and official language minorities, thank you for your dedication to these communities.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

**Mr. Jo  l Godin:** Commissioner, I want to join Mr. Samson and Mr. Arseneault in sincerely thanking you for what you've done for the francophonie and official languages in Canada. On behalf of the Conservative Party, thank you.

**The Chair:** Mr. Beaulieu, you have the floor.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** Mr. Th  berge, despite our disagreements, we've had some very interesting discussions. I, too, want to thank you for all the work you have done.

**The Chair:** Congratulations to the entire team of the Commissioner of Official Languages.

We're going to go in camera, so I'm going to ask everyone who is not officially required to be in the room to leave.

The meeting is suspended.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

• (1200)

(Pause)

• (1210)







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