



The
Manitoba
Teachers'
Society



MASS
MANITOBA ASSOCIATION OF
SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS



October 29, 2016

Honourable Mélanie Joly
Minister of Canadian Heritage
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Dear Minister Joly,

Re: Cross Canada Consultation on Official Languages 2016

Introduction

On behalf of the public education sector in Manitoba we, the five public education partners (consisting of, in alphabetical order: the Manitoba Association of Parent Councils, the Manitoba Association of School Business Officials, the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents, the Manitoba School Boards Association and the Manitoba Teachers' Society) would like to thank the Government of Canada for the opportunity to submit our collective perspectives and views on the importance of ongoing Federal support for official language minority communities and bilingual education across Canada. Through the Department of Canadian Heritage and its partner departments and agencies, the Federal Government currently provides three critical sources of support for French language education across the early, middle, senior and post-secondary years of public education in Manitoba. We wish to provide meaningful acknowledgement concerning these supports and recommendations for the future, with concluding observations regarding our shared obligations under the calls to action issued by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada in 2015.

1) Francophone education

In respect of our Province's only francophone school division, la *Division scolaire franco-manitobaine*, your Government's funding commitments help to supplement and sustain the delivery of quality education programming, services and supports to Manitoba's important official language minority community. Protecting and enhancing this funding could not be more important at current time. The reality that French language public education must remain available to the franco-manitobaine community is proportionately related to the vast geographic expanse of our province. From Thompson in the north, to Saint Lazare in the west through to Winnipeg and the many francophone communities that dot the Interlake, South Central and Whiteshell regions of our prairie landscape, Manitoba's francophone presence is widespread. Given this wide diffusion of francophone programming across our province, your vital funding support means that each of these communities shall continue to benefit from the delivery of significant public education in their own mother tongue. Without Canadian Heritage's support, these communities, which are often isolated from one another, would find persistence in maintaining their unique cultural and linguistic identities a growing challenge.

As education partners, we remain ever cognizant that the loss of cultural and linguistic identities is a very real threat given the demographic, linguistic and economic circumstances faced by these communities. Maintaining these identities therefore remains a delicate and fragile balance— one that remains weighted in favour of cultural and linguistic continuity as long as there are a variety of supports, including the Federal Government's ongoing funding investments. In this respect, the very establishment of la *Division scolaire franco-manitobaine* has represented an important factor in achieving the self-actualization of our francophone communities. La DSFM provides a significant network that helps connect our francophone communities with one another, provides venues to support and advance educational as well as community initiatives, and continues to enable and foster the continuing collective sense of *chez nous* and *joie de vivre* that have always been important cornerstones of this community.

As we prepare to enter the third decade of the twenty-first century, the vitality and strength of Manitoba's francophone community therefore directly depends upon the provision of strong and adequately funded educational experiences, through la DSFM, that will ensure that future generations of our francophone communities are able to learn, grow and become the kinds of culturally and linguistically competent citizens who will serve to promote Canadian unity and maintain Manitoba's distinct sense of place and history within confederation. With fiscal contexts increasingly challenged at the provincial level in terms of public education investment, sustained Canadian Heritage funding is a necessary good to which each member of our francophone minority community is rightfully entitled under our *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. We therefore remain, alongside of this community, extremely grateful for your ongoing support in addressing these requirements.

Recommendation 1: Into the foreseeable future, it will be very important that Canadian Heritage grants continue to keep pace with the rising inflationary pressures that are being experienced across all school divisions in Manitoba but especially by la *Division scolaire franco-manitobaine*. This is due to the fact that the additional costs incurred by la DSFM are on average 30 per cent greater than those experienced by other school divisions in our province. This is largely attributable to the distinct requirement to provide meaningful services and supports, extra-curricular experiences for students, and professional development opportunities for staff, all in the French language, that does not exist for other school divisions of comparable size in terms of pupil enrolment. While the majority of revenues used to support la DSFM derive from a combination of local taxation and provincial grants, Canadian Heritage's contribution remains of critical importance, without which it would prove very difficult for la DSFM to achieve its ongoing mandate and objectives.

With newcomer and refugee settlement representing one of the primary sources of growth within the franco-manitobaine community, directing additional funding to la DSFM for appropriate integration supports, including English as an Additional Language programming to support these students' full integration into the larger Manitoba community, remains important. With current Federal focus on the expansion of early learning and child care opportunities to support working families across Canada, it is essential that opportunities for expansion of French language child care centres and for training of early childhood educators also factors into planning for the sustainment of official language minority communities, especially given the close relationships that often exist between our public education and early learning sectors. In both of these respects, newcomer settlement and early learning and child care, we appreciate that funding of such programming requires careful and considered cooperation across Federal mandates and portfolios to ensure seamlessness of strategy. Doing so however, will comprehensively support the needs of Manitoba's official language minority community.

Recommendation 2: When developing its budget estimates for future years in support of larger francophone education system in Manitoba, we would therefore invite and strongly recommend that Canadian Heritage and its partner departments and agencies within the Government of Canada, consider the significant supports required by francophone newcomer and refugee students, as well as opportunities for expansion of early childhood education and child care in French. Enhancing official language communities, services and capacity in Canada and, particularly in Manitoba, is a multifaceted commitment that ought not to fall uniquely to one department or agency of the Federal Government alone. Canadian Heritage represents a significant source of funding in support of official language minority communities but it is further recommended that it be also joined by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship; Families, Children and Social Development, and many other portfolios, to address the most urgent and pressing needs within official language minority communities.

We as educational partners in Manitoba firmly believe in the principle that, notwithstanding the individual circumstances of official language minority communities outside of eastern Canada, the equality of our two official languages remains paramount at all times from sea to sea. This was the vision of our province's founders in 1870 and shall endure as a lasting heritage that we shall seek to promote and defend at all times within Manitoba. Canadian Heritage grants support our ongoing quest for this promotion of diversity and respect for all peoples within our province.

2) Immersion Education

Beyond the protection and promotion of the rights of Manitoba's official language minority community, Canadian Heritage investments also help to support the delivery of important immersion programs for those families that seek to provide our youth with the opportunity and benefit to pursue bilingual and bicultural education. With the changing face of Canadian demographics since the first immersion programs were started here in Manitoba nearly forty years ago, we see the role of our immersion programming increasingly characterized as an opportunity that is more than bilingual and bicultural. These programs remain in demand across our province and many newcomer Canadian families, be they refugee or permanent

resident status, opt to enrol their children in these programs. It is notable that in Manitoba, 22 out of 38 public school divisions offer French Immersion programming in 106 schools.

Each year through our immersion programs, our public education system graduates a cadre of young adults who are not only equipped to express themselves in both official languages but many of whom go on to provide multilingual and multicultural contributions that serve to further promote rapprochement, intercultural understanding and relationship-building across our diverse population. Without these young people, Manitoba would also quickly lose its ability to staff important Federal government positions in our province, while it would also be a challenge to maintain equality of services in the official bilingual context of the City of Winnipeg and also for delivery of vital health and social services to francophone and newcomer communities alike. Such programming therefore fulfills the very vision of the Federal Government for the constitutional protections it afforded Canada's unique heritage as a bilingual but also as a multicultural community.

However, Manitoba faces many challenges in our ongoing maintenance of this kind of public education system. The increasingly popularity and growth of immersion programs, combined with the need to sustain educational programming, services and supports for our official language minority community, has meant that our ability to provide linguistically and culturally proficient resources to meet demand is increasingly limited by the overall availability of such resources. Whether in terms of human resources, teaching and instructional resources, or the provision of extra-curricular opportunities for students in both official languages, we recognize that Manitoba is now entering a critical period in our history. The ongoing support of Canadian Heritage for initiatives designed to address our demand for supply of required resources could not be more important at the current time.

Recommendation 3: We would therefore recommend that Canadian Heritage continue to identify funding to support important recruitment and retention incentives and other initiatives designed to address need for teaching and non-instructional staff within the public education sector itself, along with grants in support of the many longstanding community organizations that help maintain the bilingual face and fabric of our province. Through such grants, Canadian Heritage directly strengthens our ability to provide meaningful and quality educational opportunities for all students both within and outside of the classroom.

Whether through its support for student exchange and language monitor programs at the secondary and post-secondary levels; calls for complementary project funding applications in support of French public education; or arts, history and media subsidies for such important community-based organizations such as Canadian Parents for French, le Cercle Molière, le Festival du Voyageur, le Centre culturel franco-manitobaine, le Conseil jeunesse provincial, as well as French language media outlets such as Radio-Canada and La Liberté (to name just a few examples), the Federal Government plays a key role in helping each one of our organizations. Together, these organizations promote the ongoing establishment of a unique linguistic and cultural milieu that provides mutual benefit for our students, their families and our staff, in their effort to foster language learning experiences that will make a genuine difference.

We therefore conclude by affirming and acknowledging the importance of continuing this critical funding mandate. Based on the Province of Manitoba's population surveys, that Manitoba has promoted the growth of a population that self-identifies as nearly 25 per cent bilingual (English and French) is indeed indicative of our shared success in promoting official bilingualism in Canada. We must therefore work conjointly to ensure that immersion programming continues to flourish in future years. This is an endeavour that must occur both within and outside of the classroom, if we are to continue to meet with success.

3) Post-secondary education and training

As believers in the advantages and benefits of lifelong learning and career development after Grade 12, we would be remiss if we did not also acknowledge the important support that comes from Canadian Heritage in support of the ongoing programming, supports and services that are locally available to our students from both Francophone and French Immersion education programs through l'Université de Saint-Boniface (USB). While USB is outside of the direct responsibility of our five organizations, that it has stood for nearly two centuries as a centre for higher education and training in the French language provides immense local opportunity for our graduates. Through its transfers to the Province of Manitoba in support of USB, Canadian Heritage provides many of our students with the ability to continue their studies and to achieve greater *approfondissement* in the French language.

Many of the academic and training programs offered by USB are also foundational to our sustainability and growth as a public education sector. The teacher education, early childhood educator, and master of school counselling programs find

relevance in the immediate context of our sector, while graduates from USB's arts and science, social work, translation, and information technology programs provide ancillary support to our francophone and immersion education programs on a daily basis.

Recommendation 4: We therefore recognize with gratitude Canadian Heritage's ongoing support for USB's mandate and programming, which currently accounts for just over one tenth of the total funding that USB receives in support of its programming, and we recommend that Canadian Heritage continue its support, with consideration for possible enhancement to its overall level of support.

The expansion of demand for post-secondary training has also meant the development of new and recent partnerships in support of French language technical-vocational, trades and apprenticeship programming between la *Division scolaire franco-manitobaine* and the Manitoba Institute of Trades and Technology (MITT). Based on longstanding need within Manitoba for French language trades and apprenticeship training, the partnership between la DSFM and MITT responds to a growing demand for more localized offerings. We are hopeful that through the ongoing development of this programming partnership, francophone students in Manitoba who wish to pursue trades training in French will now be able to do so starting at the secondary level, while those interested in continuing at the post-secondary level may no longer have to leave our province to pursue such training in New Brunswick, which has been the only option available to them for many years. While we are certainly grateful to the Province of New Brunswick for accommodating Manitoba apprentices within their trades training sector, the development of French language trades training capacity in Manitoba will promote affordability, longer term retention, and greater availability of students and apprentices to respond to local employment opportunities. This will provide significant benefit to our future francophone and Francophile tradespeople.

Recommendation 5: As the DSFM/MITT technical-vocational and trades training partnership continues to expand and develop, it will be important for Canadian Heritage to consider the future potential for increased funding support for this important partnership, which will serve to promote important French language trades training capacity within Manitoba, for the very first time in our province's history.

4) Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action

The official bilingualism policy of Canada means that to date, the framework and focus for official languages at the Federal as well as at the Provincial levels of government, have been exclusively directed towards achieving duality and equality for both English and French. With recognition for the important calls to action issued by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada in 2015, all education partners in Manitoba are working together to determine how best to achieve implementation and contextualization of the calls to action within our public education sector. Particularly in respect of calls to action 13 through 17 which speak to the importance of education and instruction of Aboriginal and Indigenous languages, we would like to emphasize that going forward, the focus and framework for official languages should be expanded to provide formal recognition to the reality that all Aboriginal and Indigenous languages are founding languages of Canada, alongside of English and French.

Recommendation 6: Given the experience and capacity of the Official Languages Commissioner of Canada, the establishment of a distinctive Language Commission for Aboriginal and Indigenous languages as called for by the TRC, is recommended to help to coordinate achievement of the important mandate to help promote and sustain Aboriginal and Indigenous language acquisition and learning across Canada.

By the end of our current generation, it is estimated that over thirty Aboriginal and Indigenous languages in Canada will regrettably become extinct, as the first language speakers of these dialects pass away— the last of that generation who were able to retain their languages in spite of the residential school experiences suffered by First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples. Given this reality, the incentive for concerted action and effort on the part of all organizations in our country for meaningful interventions could therefore not be any greater. This is especially true across the education sector in Canada, whether this be in First Nations schools or in the public education sector.

In Manitoba, several public school divisions are therefore developing new Aboriginal and Indigenous language instruction programs where these have never been offered before. Through the Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre, a significant Provincial Transition Initiative is coming to fruition that will realize the pilot formation of Manitoba's first network of First Nations schools. An important and core focus of this network will be the establishment of a distinctive education approach based on Aboriginal and Indigenous culture, with increased opportunities for language instruction. However, based on current resources and fiscal constraints, the First Nations and the public education sector in Canada cannot stand alone in helping to achieve the survival of Aboriginal and Indigenous languages.

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Recommendation 7: It is therefore recommended that new sources of funding and subsidy be allocated to support the resources necessary to ensure that future generations of students benefit from the promise of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada through the preservation and protection of Aboriginal and Indigenous languages. It is further recommended that no single department or agency be placed in a silo in its efforts to achieve such an important national objective. If significant progress is to be made, the collective effort that will be required will transcend the mandates of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada; Families, Children and Social Development; Canadian Heritage; and the Office of the Language Commissioner.

In closing

In closing, we would like to again thank the Government of Canada for the opportunity to communicate our priorities and recommendations for ongoing and enhanced official language funding and initiatives in support of public education in Manitoba. On behalf of our five organizations, each of which represents a critical partner in providing leadership and support alongside of the Government of Canada for the promotion of bilingual, multicultural, and Aboriginal and Indigenous rights through education, we look forward to the forthcoming finalization of Canadian Heritage's multi-year action plan for official languages. We ask that you not hesitate to contact us, if we can be of further assistance in clarifying our priorities under this plan.

Sincerely,



Ken Cameron
President, MSBA

Norm Gould
President, MTS

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cc Randy Boissonnault, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage
Dan Vandal, Member of Parliament for Saint-Boniface
Senator Raymonde Gagné