

CPF *Canadian Parents for French*

Alberta Branch

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Honourable Dave Hancock
Minister of Education
Government of Alberta
#224 Legislature Building
10800 97 Ave
Edmonton AB T5K 2B6

Re: Development of a New *School Act* for Alberta

Minister Hancock:

It has come to our attention that your department is in the process of reviewing the current *School Act* so that a new education act can be presented to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta in 2010. Our association has participated at all current levels in *Inspiring Education: A Dialogue with Albertans* and we look forward to continuing this involvement.

It is our understanding that, parallel to *Inspiring Education*, you are consulting with other members of Alberta's education community regarding the *School Act*. Canadian Parents for French, Alberta Branch, therefore, wishes to provide you with some input towards this process, specifically with regard to the status of programs for students to learn their second official language.

French and English are the Official Languages of Canada. As such, the Province of Alberta has agreed to:

"Working with the French Language Services Branch of Alberta Education to better serve Francophone Albertans attending Francophone schools and increasing opportunities for all Alberta students to learn French by making available French immersion programs, French second language courses and related services." (Francophone Secretariat, Employment & Immigration, Government of Alberta, 2007)

Under "Other languages of instruction," the current Alberta legislation states in Part 1 section 11(1) and (2) :

- 11 (1) A board may authorize the use of French or any other language as a language of instruction.
- (2) The Minister may make regulations governing the provision of instruction in any language authorized under subsection (1). (Government of Alberta, 1995-2009)

The act goes on to allow "Alternative programs" as follows:

- 21 (1) In this section, "alternative program" means an education program that
 - (a) emphasizes a particular language, culture, religion or subject matter, or
 - (b) uses a particular teaching philosophy,
- (2) If a board determines that there is sufficient demand for a particular alternative program, the board may offer that program to those students whose parents enroll them in the program.
- (3) A board that offers an alternative program shall continue to offer the regular education program to those students whose parents do not enroll them in the alternative program.

- (4) If a parent enrolls a student in an alternative program, the board may charge that parent fees for the purpose of defraying all or a portion of any noninstructional costs that
- (a) may be incurred by the board in offering the alternative program, and
 - (b) are in addition to the costs incurred by the board in providing its regular education program.
- (Government of Alberta, 1995-2009)

Under the current School Act, School districts must categorize French immersion as an alternative program. The policies that apply to alternative programs make it unnecessarily difficult for parents to have a new French immersion program started. They can be required to prepare and submit the same sorts of proposals -- including items such as pedagogical validity and operational budget - as a hockey school or performing arts school. This is an onerous task given the fact that there is development, by your department, of a full curriculum and accompanying teaching/learning resources. By having French immersion categorized independently would remove some of the hurdles created by including it within the category of "alternate program".

As outlined in the April 2009 ministerial mandate, the Alberta government continues to place priority on creating opportunities by enhancing value-added activity and building a skilled workforce to improve the long-run sustainability of Alberta's economy. As we look to promoting economic diversification within our province, and beyond our borders, having a population skilled in both official languages is advantageous. Further, the program is federally supported, and with more than forty years of research, there is proof that French immersion is an overwhelming success.

We would encourage the Alberta government to strengthen the status of French as an official language of Canada within the school act, and to provide a signal to school jurisdictions that the teaching of French should be considered fundamental to the education of young Albertans. In this way, Alberta's *School Act* will have even more potential to:

- prepare Alberta students for full active participation in the economy, society and democracy in our province and at the national and international levels;
- support equity of opportunity for students in all parts of our province to learn French as a second language; and
- recognize the strengths that diversity provides to our society.
- ensure the availability of opportunities for all students to achieve their highest potential, including fluency in the second official language of their country:

Canadian Parents for French (CPF) is the national network of volunteers that values French as an integral part of Canada and is dedicated to the promotion and creation of French-second-language learning opportunities for young Canadians

Should you have any questions or require clarification on our position, please do not hesitate to contact me through our office listed above.

Yours sincerely,

Shannon Nelson
President

cc Maureen Towns, Director, Legislative Services, Alberta Education
Paul Lamoureux, Executive Director, French and International Education Services Sector, Alberta Education