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Government Response to the Sixth Report of the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages

*French-language Education in a Minority Setting:
A Continuum from Early Childhood to the Postsecondary Level*

November 2006

Canada 



The Honourable Maria Chaput
Chairman
Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages
The Senate of Canada
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A4

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Dear Senator Chaput:

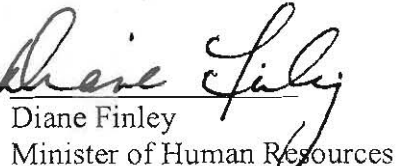
Pursuant to Section 131 of the Rules of the Senate of Canada and on behalf of the Government of Canada, we are pleased to transmit the Government Response to the Sixth Report of the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages, entitled *French-language Education in a Minority Setting: A Continuum from Early Childhood to the Postsecondary Level*.


The Government is committed to enforce the spirit and letter of the *Official Languages Act* in all federal departments and institutions and to recognize that linguistic duality is one of the foundations of Canadian society.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank you and the Committee members for your review of this important issue, and recognize the significance of your work and the recommendations made. In particular, the Government wants to assure the Committee that the important issues raised in its recommendations will be the subject of thoughtful reflection as the Government is committed to have a constructive dialogue with official language minority communities.

Yours sincerely,


Josée Verner
Minister of International
Cooperation, Minister
for La Francophonie and
Official Languages


Diane Finley
Minister of Human Resources
and Social Development


Beverly Oda
Minister of
Canadian Heritage
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**GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE SIXTH REPORT OF
THE STANDING SENATE COMMITTEE ON OFFICIAL LANGUAGES**

On June 6, 2006, a motion requesting a complete and detailed response from the Government of Canada to the Standing Senate Committee Report, entitled *French-language Education in a Minority Setting: A Continuum from Early Childhood to the Postsecondary Level*, was tabled by Senator Chaput and adopted by the Senate. The report focuses on the continuum of French-language education in a minority setting. It outlines the issues raised by the fifty witnesses who appeared before the Committee since the start of the study in 2003.

The focus of the Committee's Report on the education continuum is a subject of vital importance to all Canadians, including those living in minority language communities. While education falls within provincial and territorial jurisdiction, the Government of Canada is committed to working with provinces and territories to support and improve the educational opportunities and outcomes for all Canadians living in minority language communities.

Linguistic duality is an integral part of Canadian identity. The Government of Canada is committed to promoting the development of official language minority communities and enhancing access to government services in both official languages and to education systems that provide opportunities for Canadians to learn a second official language as well as to be better equipped to face global challenges.

This Response highlights the progress the Government of Canada has made in promoting linguistic duality from early learning and child care, through primary and secondary education to postsecondary education, and the additional investments set out in Budget 2006.

For the purposes of this Government Response, the 8 recommendations have been grouped under four broad themes:

- a) overall commitment to French-Language Minority Education;
- b) early learning and child care;
- c) primary and secondary education; and
- d) postsecondary education.

The response for each theme begins with the recommendations contained in the Report and is followed by the Government Response to these issues.

A. OVERALL COMMITMENT TO FRENCH-LANGUAGE MINORITY EDUCATION:

RECOMMENDATION 1:

That the federal government implement:

- a) a national campaign to increase awareness of, and respect for, language rights on the part of all Canadians; and**
- b) an information campaign directed to Francophone communities in a minority setting and rights-holders under s. 23 of the Charter, regarding their rights to French-language education and the relevant case law.**

RECOMMENDATION 4:

That all levels of government coordinate their policies to guarantee that Francophone communities in a minority setting have sufficient human, material, physical and financial resources, in order to recruit and retain students and achieve a quality of education that is equivalent to that of the linguistic majority.

RECOMMENDATION 8:

That Canada develop a national policy on early childhood and primary, secondary and postsecondary education, which:

- a) includes long-term federal commitments, partnerships with all stakeholders, and an accountability framework; and**
- b) takes into consideration the particular needs of Francophone communities in a minority setting and rights-holders under s. 23 of the Charter.**

Response:

The Government remains strongly committed to fostering minority-language education in Canada. It recognizes that there are additional costs involved with delivering minority-language education programs and will continue to provide assistance to the provinces and territories.

This federal and provincial/territorial cooperation has yielded many benefits for the past thirty-five years and has resulted in an investment of about \$5 billion over that period. Key results include: school management of minority schools by minority communities has become a reality throughout the country, stable enrolment remains for Kindergarten to grade 12 education programs, and a number of school and community centres have been established to help official language communities. At the postsecondary level, university and college networks have been developed in minority official language communities. This partnership has led to helping students from Francophone minorities reach parity with those from the Anglophone majority with respect to the percentage of postsecondary graduates within one and a half generations.

Despite the progress, the Government of Canada acknowledges that more could be done to face the challenges of learning in a minority setting. The Government of Canada, therefore intends to work with the provinces and territories to help them implement initiatives designed to enhance the quality of education in a minority setting such as recruitment of qualified teachers, purchase of high standard pedagogical resources and the development of methods using new technologies.

The Government acknowledges the need to enhance the awareness of linguistic rights. Canadian Heritage, through its Official Languages Support Programs, supports various provincial and territorial initiatives undertaken by French school boards to promote French schools in a minority setting. It also supports the provinces and territories in implementing second-language learning initiatives, which contribute to raising youth awareness of linguistic duality and making young people more open to minority rights. According to an Ipsos-Reid survey in 2004, French immersion students have greater awareness of linguistic duality than students in the other school systems.

Federal officials from Canadian Heritage and other departments will continue to discuss regularly issues linked to child care and postsecondary education in order to harmonize potential projects. Within the scope of the renewed agreements on education, Canadian Heritage will continue to discuss with the provinces and territories as well as with educational organizations and associations to identify priorities for action on minority education challenges and promote multilateral projects.

The Government of Canada is eager to reinforce accountability and the achievement of results for Canadians. It has already implemented a government-wide management and accountability framework which serves as an ongoing reminder to Ministers and their officials of the priority given to linguistic duality. This framework is designed to ensure that all federal institutions are committed to enhancing the vitality of the English and French linguistic minority communities in Canada and supporting and assisting their development as well as fostering the full recognition and use of both English and French in Canadian society. The Government of Canada is committed to conducting ongoing high level consultations on education with key stakeholders including those from official languages communities.

B. EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE

RECOMMENDATION 2:

That federal policies and programs for early childhood take into consideration the needs of parents, in order to promote their children's full development and French-language learning beginning in early childhood at home.

RECOMMENDATION 3:

That the federal government:

- a) include a language clause in all of its protocols and agreements to ensure that Francophone communities in a minority setting benefit fully from early childhood initiatives; and**
- b) expand the protocols and agreements on minority-language education to include preschool services as part of the continuum of French minority-language education.**

Response:

Supporting parents in their choice of child care and respecting the provincial and territorial roles and responsibilities with respect to child care services are key to this government's approach to child care. In February 2006, the Government of Canada announced its new Universal Child Care Plan. The first element, the Universal Child Care Benefit, provides direct payments of \$100 per month per child under the age of six to all eligible families, including families with French-language learning needs. Effective July 1, 2006, an estimated 1.5 million families were eligible to receive the Universal Child Care Benefit, on behalf of a total of 2.1 million children under the age of six. The second element is the Child Care Space Initiative, which will provide \$250 M per year to create new child care spaces, effective 2007-08. As part of this initiative, federal officials are undertaking consultations which include representatives from official language minority communities to ensure representation of their interests.

In addition, under two existing multilateral agreements, the Government of Canada provides transfers to provinces and territories to support early childhood development and child care programs and services totaling \$800 M in 2006-2007. These agreements recognize the need for programs to be inclusive of and responsive to the children in various linguistic circumstances.

The Government of Canada recognizes that early childhood is a priority for official language community development. Early childhood provides a substantial recruiting pool for minority French schools. Under the bilateral agreements on education, Canadian Heritage, in cooperation with the provinces and territories, already supports some school preparation measures, including additions to junior kindergarten programs, primary school integration strategies for 5 year-olds, and partnerships with child care services.

The Government of Canada will continue to support provincial and territorial activities that help integrate pre-school services into the minority French-language education continuum while respecting the K-12 primary mandate of provincial and territorial education ministries.

C. PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION:

RECOMMENDATION 5:

That the federal government and its partners develop a new framework for the administration of the Official Languages in Education Program for the purposes of:

- a) providing equitable and stable funding for education to Francophone communities in a minority setting;**
- b) reviewing the process of negotiation of the protocol and the involvement of the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada;**
- c) ensuring the direct participation of French-language school boards in the negotiation of education agreements;**
- d) separating minority-language and second-language programs in the negotiation of education protocols and agreements; and**
- e) respecting the deadlines for the renewal of the protocol and bilateral education agreements.**

RECOMMENDATION 6:

That the federal government, through the Official Languages in Education Program, implement:

- a) effective accountability and reporting mechanisms to ensure that the allocation of federal funds corresponds to the objectives of the federal government and the expectations of Francophone communities in a minority setting; and**
- b) better evaluation measures to determine whether the expected results have been achieved.**

Response:

The Government of Canada and the provincial and territorial governments recognize the importance of quality intergovernmental relations. Governments also acknowledge the role of educational organizations and associations and they intend to consult them about the programs and strategies for official languages in education in the context of their partnership. Negotiations on this partnership will, however, remain between the two orders of government.

Canadian Heritage and the Council of Minister of Education, Canada, on behalf of 13 provinces and territories, concluded in November 2005 a Protocol for Agreements for Minority-Language Education and Second-Language Instruction for a four-year period, from 2005 to 2009. In accordance with the parameters of the Protocol, the Minister of International Cooperation and Minister for La Francophonie and Official Languages signed, in 2005-2006, bilateral cost-shared agreements for a four-year period together with action plans for each province and territory.

During the period preceding the signing of the bilateral agreements, Canadian Heritage continued to support the provinces and territories through annual bilateral arrangements.

During that time, both levels of government agreed on the following priority areas to address minority education challenges: French school promotion, student recruitment and retention, program enrichment, teaching resources development, school-community outreach, teacher recruitment, distance training, improved access to postsecondary education and research.

The current Protocol reiterates the objectives of giving young Canadians better access to minority-language education and providing second official language instruction, and includes several elements likely to have significant medium- and long-term impact. These include:

- federal investments of more than \$1 billion over four years that will generate equal or superior provincial and territorial investments;
- financial stability to help the provinces and territories prepare multi-year action plans;
- the possibility of working together on multilateral or pan-Canadian projects notably for research;
- consultation with organizations and associations active on education issues; and,
- an accountability framework which provides better communication of results to Canadians.

Under the bilateral agreements ratified after the signature of the Protocol, Canadian Heritage supports many provincial and territorial governments measures such as: improved quality of education programs offered in minority schools in order to give communities increased access to a high-quality education in their own language in their communities, and recruitment and retention of more students in minority French-language schools across the country. Canadian Heritage also supports special development initiatives, such as the establishment of school and community centres, that are expected to lead to significant progress in French minority education.

Separate funding envelopes now exist for minority-language education and second-language instruction. Canadian Heritage has developed a results-based management and accountability framework, setting out specific results and progress measurement indicators for each program component. Under the new Protocol, governments have agreed on accountability and public reporting mechanisms. Measures being taken include posting key documents on their websites and working together to produce and publish two reports of pan-Canadian scope on the implementation of provincial and territorial action plans over the four-year period in order to report on results achieved in the context of these plans.

D. POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION (PSE):

RECOMMENDATION 7:

That the federal government through its foundations and agencies:

- a) strengthen the network of French-language colleges and network of French-language universities in Canada by providing them with sufficient resources to meet their objectives; and**
- b) contribute more to the funding of research programs and to the development of a research capacity at French-language universities in a minority setting.**

Response:

An important determinant of the ongoing vitality of the French-language community in minority settings is that there is access to quality postsecondary education (PSE) and training so that the community leaders of the future are able to learn and succeed in French. Universities and colleges generally operate under the legislative jurisdiction of the provinces, who provide operating grants and supports to students. Provincial governments have primary responsibility for postsecondary education, however, Government of Canada support is also significant.

The Government of Canada invests close to \$9 billion per year in postsecondary education, about \$4 billion through the Canada Social Transfer and approximately \$5 billion in grants and loans, tax credits and saving incentives, and support for research.

Budget 2006 announced significant additional PSE investments:

- a new Textbook Tax Credit, expanded eligibility for Canada Student Loans, and the exemption of scholarship and bursary income from tax;
- a new \$1000 apprenticeship grant and a tax credit for employers hiring apprentices;
- an additional \$40 M per year for Indirect Costs of Research, \$40 M for the granting councils, and \$20 M for the Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI) Leaders Opportunity Fund; and
- a Postsecondary Education Infrastructure Trust of \$1 billion, in one-time funding, made available to the provinces and territories to support urgent investments in postsecondary education infrastructure.

In addition, Budget 2006 included a commitment to consult on “a new approach to long-term and predictable support for postsecondary education (PSE) and training”.

As part of this commitment, the Budget mandated the Minister of HRSDC to lead discussions with provinces and territories on postsecondary education and training with respect to: overall objectives, appropriate roles, and developing a framework for ensuring measurable results and accountability in respect of funding. To complement these discussions, HRSD also consulted with Canadians and key stakeholders including those representing minority French-language postsecondary institutions. In addition, a web-

based consultation process was launched and senior officials met with representatives from stakeholder groups.

These measures benefit a broad range of Canadian PSE institutions and individual learners including those from official language minority communities.

The Government of Canada has also provided endowments and funding to foundations and agencies which undertake work in the area of postsecondary education. Each has been mandated to fulfill a specific purpose including support to students and funding of research projects at postsecondary institutions. Although these organizations are independent, arm's length bodies, as recipients of federal grants, they are required to respect the official languages clause contained in their contribution agreements. Examples of these include: the Canada Foundation for Innovation, the Canadian Council on Learning, the Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation and the Granting Councils.

A number of federal departments also play a direct role in supporting Canadians in pursuing postsecondary education and training. Key initiatives related to the above recommendations are outlined below.

HRSDC administers a number of programs that assist Canadians in saving for and financing their postsecondary education. In collaboration with the Canada Revenue Agency, HRSDC helps Canadian families save for their children's postsecondary education through: the Canada Education Savings Program for Canadians, the Registered Education Savings Plan (RESP) and the Canada Education Savings Grant. HRSDC also helps millions of individuals to access postsecondary education and achieve their learning goals through grants and loans, including via the Canada Student Loans Program, the Canada Graduate Scholarship, and funding of the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation (CMSF).

Specific examples of HRSDC's contributions to the development of French-language postsecondary institutions through investments in new learning technologies targeting official language minority communities include over \$400,000 in assistance to the Fédération de la jeunesse canadienne-française in New Brunswick for related projects and \$200,000 in assistance to the New Brunswick Community College to assess the educational possibilities of new immersive 3D interfaces.

Also, the Foreign Credential Recognition (FCR) Program looks to help integrate new immigrants into Canada's labour market through the recognition of credentials of individuals educated abroad. Efforts are also made to ensure that francophone minority communities are considered. For example, through the FCR Program, a contribution agreement supports the development of knowledge transfer tools to ensure francophone colleges have the resources to integrate foreign trained French-speaking immigrants into their institutions.

Over the past 20 years, Canadian Heritage has invested some \$200 M to support special initiatives that have helped build the French-language postsecondary network we know

today. For example, it contributed \$46 M for the establishment of the network of French-language colleges in Ontario, and also participated in infrastructure projects and development of programs in some universities (Université de Moncton - \$17 M, Université Sainte-Anne - \$14 M, Collège universitaire de Saint-Boniface - \$10 M). More recent investments helped fund the Institut français of the University of Regina and a French studies program at Simon Fraser University. Canadian Heritage has also long supported the *Association des universités de la francophonie canadienne* (AUFC) and the *Réseau des cégeps et collèges francophones du Canada* (RCCFC), two key stakeholders in French-language postsecondary file.

Under the new bilateral agreements on education, \$100 M will be invested in provincial and territorial initiatives to improve access to French-language postsecondary education over the four-year period. Such initiatives could include the development of new programs, measures to facilitate the transition from high school to college or university, distance learning, and strengthening institutional infrastructure.

With respect to research, for a number of years, Canadian Heritage has been helping advance research in the official languages field. For instance, it contributed to the creation of the Canadian Institute for Research on Linguistic Minorities at the Université de Moncton. The Institute's mandate is to conduct and publish multidisciplinary studies highlighting key factors with an impact on minority Francophone and Anglophone community development.

Canadian Heritage and the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) have launched the Official Languages Research and Dissemination Program to promote research on official languages policies and practices and disseminate findings. The three-year co-funded program has an annual budget of \$1 M. It will help carry out research projects in Canadian universities, including minority French-language universities. Project selection centres on four themes, including minority-language education. So far, the program has supported 39 research projects in 19 Canadian universities, including 11 at the University of Ottawa, 4 at the Université de Moncton, 2 at the Collège universitaire de Saint-Boniface and 1 at Glendon College.

Over the 2003-2008 period, Health Canada will invest \$63 M in funding to the Consortium national de formation en santé for the training and retention of French-speaking health professionals. The Consortium which comprises ten postsecondary institutions at the university and college levels, aims to improve the quality of French-language health services available to French-speaking minority communities. It is anticipated that this initiative will lead to the enrolment of 2,500 students and produce 1,250 graduates by the year 2008. As of March 2006, the Consortium's Training and Research Project had generated 1,428 new enrolments (33% more than expected), 296 graduates (32% more than expected) and 16 new training programs (80% of its objective).

In terms of federal support for research capacity in the area of health, in December 2004, the Consortium organized the first National Forum on Research relating to the Health of

French-speaking minority communities. This forum led to the development of national research teams who have now begun to operate at inter-regional and inter-institutional levels.