

Position paper calls for improved French immersion in schools

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Canadian Parents for French New Brunswick is calling on the province to improve the access and quality of French immersion in New Brunswick schools as part of the ongoing review of the Official Languages Act.

In a 46-page position paper, the Sussex-based branch of the national organization outlined nearly 30 recommendations to the province as part of the Act review process. Board of directors member Dorothy White said the position paper was written by Dr. Joseph Dicks on behalf of CPFNB, and the recommendations were prepared in partnership with la Société de l'Acadie du Nouveau-Brunswick (SANB).

"We are hopeful we will be able to contribute our ideas for the better delivery of French second language education," said White. "Premier Blaine Higgs said ... he would like to see an improvement to French teaching to anglophones, so we can reach our targets explained in the 10-year education plan."

"So far, we are not meeting the target of 90 per cent of high school graduates able to achieve the appropriate levels in their second language."

White said most of the recommendations focus on improving french immersion from Grades 6 to 12. A provincial spokesperson, meanwhile, said the review process for the Official Languages Act ended on August 31.

Key recommendations

White said three recommendations stand out as being especially important for the organization, which is dedicated to encouraging and enhancing French as a second language education in the province's anglophone population.

The first recommendation, is for the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to conduct an in-depth study to find ways of improving french-language instruction, and to increase the amount of class time students spend learning French.

The second calls on the province to increase the amount of French immersion teaching and resource staff in schools, especially in rural communities. White said there is a lack of resource teachers available who can help students with different learning requirements with French immersion, and this is leading to those students dropping out of french immersion as they are not able to learn effectively.

She said there are instances where there are no French immersion programs available at all in rural communities, because there are not enough teachers who are able to teach the program.

White said the final key recommendation identified in the paper is for the province to seek higher qualifications in teachers being hired to teach French immersion.

She said there is a difference between a teacher being able to speak French at a high level, and a teacher being able to teach French.

"Teachers need to be better trained on how a second language is acquired," said White.

As a bilingual province, White said it is important that as many opportunities as possible are made available to Anglophone students to become bilingual, and enjoy all the cultural and employment benefits which come with it.

Paper filed after deadline: province

Asked to respond to CPFNB's position paper, Government of New Brunswick spokesperson Johanne LeBlanc said in an email the Act review's consultation process ended on August 31, and the government thanks those who participated, but will not be commenting further at this time.

"The review of the Official Languages Act is an exercise that the government of New Brunswick takes very seriously," LeBlanc wrote. "The government will not be commenting while the two independent commissioners are working on their final report. The report is to be submitted to the government by December 31."

Tone: Neutral