Canadian Parents for French PEI is part of a nation-wide organization that champions the opportunity to learn and use French as a second or additional language for all those who call Canada home. (Please note that I will use the term FSL in this narrative, and refers to French second-language education programs and includes both French Immersion and Core French).

CPF PEI is a volunteer-based organization with an elected Board of Directors, has one full time staff and an office, here in Charlottetown.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide input to this committee.

In a province so small in geography we have found that we have a wide reach and therefore our programs reflect that.

Annually we give each new student to the FSL program a welcome package, Encounters with Canada Program places go to our five French Student Excellence Award winners, we have an FSL Educator of the Year, we have an École Ambassadrice du Français Program that acknowledges schools that strive for excellence in FSL programming, we send students to French summer camps, offer support to FSL teachers with school treasure chests, classroom visuals, music performances and more. We hold a Concours d’art oratoire with tens of thousands of dollars in scholarships available and we meet with parents, offer information and advice on FSL education on PEI. We do this with supporters and partners like Société Saint-Thomas D’Aquin, UPEI, Collège de l’Île, The Department of
Education, Early Learning and Culture, Université Sainte-Anne and Université de Moncton and of course The Department of Canadian Heritage. The majority of our programs are also offered to francophone youth.

Although PEI is fortunate to have the third highest enrollment in French Immersion per capita in Canada, and has had for many years, only 50% of our schools offer FI, and only five offer LFI. Access is where it all begins. If students do not have a doorway to learning an additional official language in the public school system then they have little chance of becoming conversant in both of Canada’s official languages.

As a perspective on the advancement of both official languages we would say that learning French should be the right of all Anglophones or Allophones in Canada.

(1) Therefore we recommend that early and late French immersion opportunities be provided for all those that would choose, no matter where they live.

Indeed, all French language learners, not just immersion students need to be able to learn essential communication in the second language with auditory and oral emphasis.
(2) We (CPF) recommend that Core French education be mandatory from K-12 with emphasis on speaking and communicating. Presently, PEI, it is only mandatory in grade 4-9.

In PEI the redesign of the Core French program supports the development of students' critical thinking, creativity, communication and collaboration skills. It is a literacy-based program that is learner centered, flexible and focuses on skills and strategies that lead to lifelong, self-directed learning.

The Core French students are actively engaged in meaningful activities where they develop and strengthen essential collaboration skills such as active listening, decision making and problem solving. The students are taking risks with the language, sharing their ideas and opinions and asking and answering questions, while simultaneously considering word choice, sentence structure, pronunciation, and communication strategies.

The end goal for language instruction is to enable learners to transfer classroom skills and knowledge to accomplish similar activities successfully in the real world using the target language, language is learned to be used. When students are able to apply what they have learned in the classroom to the wider community and eventually to the world beyond the classroom, language learning becomes powerful.

The next recommendation relates to how youth identify with learning languages and related cultures. (3) We (CPF) recommend that students have additional
opportunities for authentic experiences in the target language in and out of the classroom.

Learning a language without the cultural framework in which it exists is like cooking ethnic food without the spices of the region. Here is a great opportunity for rapprochement between the official language communities to work together fostering a dynamic French first and second language community.

What motivates learning the other official language? We believe this depends on when the student starts to learn and what they experience while learning. Early French immersion parents tend to look at the overall benefits while Late French immersion parents and students look at the employability factor more often. We work hard to have parents and students understand that learning a second language is not just for job futures but a life skill, increasing communications, cognitive capacity, multitasking skills and improving the functionality of their brains. In the end does this make them more employable – yes – but it also will enrich their lives. Who would not want this for their child?

To help facilitate this, recognized proficiency levels need to be in place so language learners, parents, teachers, post-secondary institutions and potential employers have a common understanding of each learner’s French-language abilities. Governments need to be accountable for reporting on achievements of FSL students. Parents and community
stakeholders need to be actively engaged and involved in decision-making with school boards.

**In summary our recommendations on measures to strengthen the federal government's support for linguistic duality is to ensure continued high level of financial and moral support for learning both of Canada’s official languages.** We understand this might mean broad changes, more access means more French teachers, all leading to a bigger investment. It is difficult to say what a country should spend on maintaining and improving its population’s ability to communicate with one another, of supporting and contributing to its national identity. What the price of official bilingualism should be. The question might be amended to “How much should my country invest in bilingualism, given our current National/International profile?” The amount a country should invest, then, depends also on what it aspires to.

In a few days you will hear from some FSL youth. Thomas Haslam, a grade 11 Late FI student from Kensington Intermediate High, is one of them. Kensington is a rural area and has only this one school for accessing French immersion. Thomas has spent many hours, days and weeks enjoying his ability to communicate in both official languages. He has entered our Concours d’art oratoire, spent a week at the Encounters with Canada Program, was one of the participants in the Prime Ministers Youth Council and will be able to speak to this committee in the coming weeks. All because he is bilingual, all because his school was able to offer him the
program, all because the OLEP agreement supports FSL education. Sadly this school’s program is in jeopardy because of the enrollment requirements for FI programs in PEI. Where will the Thomas Haslams be then if these programs are not supported and protected?

Canada is, to me, a country that is reflective of the fabric of all the people who live in it. It is bold, big, beautiful, multicultural and multilingual. Our two official languages tell the world that we are a country that embraces diversity. We need to continue to encompass all that Canada is.

Submitted by Gail Lecky, Executive Director
Canadian Parents for French PEI
Po Box 2785 Charlottetown, PE C1A 8C4
902-368-3703
glecky@cpfpei.pe.ca www.pei.cpf.ca

Sited: CPF Enrollment Statistics found in the CPF State of FSL Education in Canada Reports

CPF PEI State of FSL in PEI 2016 Report