

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE THIRTEENTH REPORT OF THE STANDING
COMMITTEE ON OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ENTITLED: *FRENCH AS A SECOND
LANGUAGE LEARNING PROGRAMS IN WESTERN CANADA:*
ENHANCING AVAILABILITY

The Honourable Denis Paradis, P.C., M.P.
Chair
Standing Committee on Official Languages
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A6

Dear Mr. Paradis:

Pursuant to House of Commons Standing Order 109, I am pleased to present you with the Government Response to the thirteenth report of the Standing Committee on Official Languages entitled, *French as a Second Language Learning Programs in Western Canada: Enhancing Availability*.

I would like to thank the Committee for its hard work and acknowledge the recommendations provided. The Government shares the Committee's commitment to increasing bilingualism of our young Canadians, which is primarily achieved through access to quality French-as-a-second-language programming.

The Government's action with respect to second-language learning focuses on Canada's education system from the primary to the post-secondary level. The Government's cooperation with provincial/territorial governments in an area that comes under provincial and territorial jurisdiction has been productive for all. Together we share the objective of providing Canadians, in each province and territory, with the opportunity to learn their second official language and to enjoy the culturally enriching experience that contact with the other official-language community provides.

While second-language learning programs vary from region to region, I would like to recognize that all thirteen provinces and territories invest significant amounts of money each year to provide second-language learning opportunities, a sign of their willingness to develop bilingualism of young people.

The Committee's report is timely, as the issues raised will inform the Government's overall effort to improve second-language learning in Canada. The next *Protocol for*

Agreements for Minority-Language Education and Second-Language Instruction (Protocol) is currently being negotiated with the provinces and territories. Our Government will continue to provide support to provincial/territorial governments in an effort to improve the quality, accessibility and diversity of French-as-a-second-language programs.

Released in March, the *Action Plan for Official Languages 2018-2023 – Investing in Our Future* proposes historic investments of \$2.7 billion over five years, including almost \$500 million in new funding. It represents a clear indication of our Government's commitment to our communities and our official languages.

One of the Action Plan's three pillars focuses specifically on promoting a bilingual Canada. The Government has set the ambitious target of increasing the national bilingualism rate from 17.9% to 20% by 2036, and expects to get there by raising the bilingualism rate of English-speakers outside Quebec from 6.8% to 9% (source: Census 2016). Bilingualism is a crucial factor in protecting and promoting our official languages, and our Government intends to support those who are invested in learning French-as-a-second-language.

Work is currently underway to implement the Action Plan and I would like to draw your attention to the following initiatives in support of developing the bilingualism of our population and strengthening linguistic duality.

After extensive consultations, I was proud to announce the new Action Plan investment, of \$31 million over four years, to support recruitment and retention strategies for French-as-a-second-language teachers. The need for qualified teachers in second-language programs has been universally raised by stakeholders in education, including students, parents, teachers, school boards and provincial and territorial ministries of Education. The new initiative will support those who aspire to become teachers and in-service teachers by funding projects to increase professional development opportunities, provide adapted teaching materials and improve working conditions, so that teachers are better equipped to play their important role.

Our Government also engages with non-governmental organizations to increase the production and dissemination of knowledge, methods, research and tools to support second-language instruction. To do so, it provides core-funding to national non-profit organizations, such as Canadian Parents for French and the Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers, to support their continued efforts to advance second-language learning activities. As part of the new Action Plan, these organizations saw their core-funding increase by 20% in 2018-19, enabling them to continue their activities that serve to increase bilingualism and promote French-as-a-second-language learning. This increase is ongoing.

Offering more cultural and exchange possibilities or opportunities to practise the second language through authentic experiences, in and out of school, improves students'

language skills. I appreciate the recognition the Committee's Report gave to the range of programs, funded by our Government, that provides young people with authentic linguistic and cultural experiences and the mention of the additional \$38.5 million that the Action Plan will be providing to reinforce the existing Explore and Odyssey programs. Our Government intends to continue its support to initiatives that help bring the two language communities together and provide access to authentic learning experiences. I am glad to see the Committee's recommendation to support second-language learners by investing in linguistic and cultural experiences.

Individual bilingualism is central to the Government's efforts to encourage and promote official languages. Making opportunities to learn French and English more accessible for all Canadians, including those with learning disabilities as recommended by the Committee, will continue to be one of our Government's priorities in the years ahead. To this end, we are working towards launching the first ever Canadian online program for learning and maintaining French and English as a second language. This program will be offered, at no cost, so that all Canadians are able to access a high quality second-language learning program and develop their skills in their second-official language.

Our two official languages are at the heart of who we are as Canadians. Our Government is committed to encouraging the development and prosperity of official language minority communities, and promoting our two official languages across the country. Again, I wish to thank the Committee for its work which will enhance the thinking for future discussions with provincial and territorial governments in the context of the next Protocol and bilateral agreements on education.

Yours sincerely,

The Honourable Mélanie Joly, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Tourism, Official Languages and La Francophonie