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# Standing Committee on Official Languages

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Chair: Mr. René Arseneault





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Thursday, April 18, 2024

• (0820)

[*Translation*]

**The Chair (Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.)):** I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 95 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3) in the motion adopted by the committee on September 20, 2023, the committee is resuming its study on federal funding for minority language post-secondary education.

I'm going to skip over the instructions for Zoom, since everyone now knows how the platform works, since the pandemic. All I ask is that those participating in the meeting virtually mute their microphones until they have the floor.

I'd like to welcome the witnesses. First, we have two representatives from the Commission nationale des parents francophones: Ms. Gillian Anderson, who is the president of the organization, therefore the Mother Superior, as well as Mr. Jean-Luc Racine, the executive director. By videoconference, we have this young man, Mr. Simon Thériault, who is the president of the Fédération de la jeunesse canadienne-française.

I will explain the meeting's process to you. I think this is the first visit for all three of you to the Standing Committee on Official Languages. You are lucky; it's the committee of the hour on Parliament Hill. We will proceed to a first round of questions, during which each political party will have six minutes to ask questions and listen to your answers. Before starting rounds of questions, we will give you the floor for five minutes at most. I am very annoying and strict on time. However, the more we keep to the time, the more rounds of questions we can have.

We will start with you, Ms. Anderson. The floor is yours for a maximum of five minutes.

**Ms. Gillian Anderson (President, Commission nationale des parents francophones):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, honourable members, good morning.

My name is Gillian Anderson and I am the president of the Commission nationale des parents francophones, or CNPF.

Founded in 1988, our network of 12 organizations represents parents living in a minority situation who choose to include French in their lives and that of their children. These parents are often part of an exogamous or multilingual family.

I thank you for inviting the CNPF to testify before you today on the issue of federal funding for minority language post-secondary institutions. I'd like to focus on parents' many needs and concerns for their children's opportunities to continue their studies in French.

A parent is not only their child's first educator, but also their first source of emotional and informational support, from early childhood to adulthood. One study shows that parents' informational and emotional support is the most important source of support for teenagers. In this respect, parents even come ahead of teachers and guidance counsellors. A parent is therefore front and centre when it's time to think about their child's post-secondary education.

Unfortunately, parents don't feel well equipped at all when comes the time to guide their teenager towards post-secondary education in French. As it is, guidance for post-secondary is not easy. Many options are available, and this is a major phase in the life of a young person and their parent. Then, if one wants to continue their studies in French, everything gets more complicated. In reality, access to francophone post-secondary institutions is limited, and they lack visibility.

Furthermore, many parents noted that it was difficult to find information on existing educational programs and francophone institutions. Sometimes, the post-secondary education in French promoted within a high school is relevant only to the local community's francophone post-secondary institution, which leaves few choices. Full and easy access to information on available francophone education and programs is essential.

Moreover, it would be worthwhile for guidance counsellors within our francophone schools to offer better guidance to parents. Regular meetings with parents and their kids would provide the assistance parents need to better support their teenagers' choices when the time comes.

Nothing guarantees that a teenager with a strong francophone cultural and community identity will continue their post-secondary education in French. Indeed, everything depends on actively offering educational programs in French. In Canada, a significant imbalance exists between programs offered in French-language and English-language post-secondary institutions.

Currently, the University of Ottawa offers more than half of all French-language minority educational programs. According to one study, even though the Western provinces' francophone population represents 19.8% of minority francophone communities, French-language programs offered in the region represent only 7.9% overall.

According to that same study, 27.5% of people who studied in French migrated to another province, compared to 10.3% for those who studied only in English.

Self-imposed exile from one's community to continue their education in French is the reality for many francophones. Very often, people who leave their community never come back. This exodus has a significant impact on official language minority communities' vitality and sustainability. That doesn't even take into account how expensive it is to leave one's community.

On this point, it's been proven that studying at a post-secondary level in French in a minority situation leads to higher costs and higher debt for students. According to one study, people who studied at university in French had a higher average debt than those who studied in English. Add mobility costs to that, since they have to move outside their community. Offering more scholarships to francophones who choose to continue their post-secondary education in French, as well as mobility grants for those who have to leave, would support the choice to study in French at the post-secondary level.

In conclusion, real measures are urgently needed to better equip parents so that they can guide their teen towards post-secondary in French. More French-language educational programs are also needed so that students can choose the program of study they are passionate about without being forced to leave. Finally, for better equality, we need more scholarship programs to reduce the debt of young francophones who choose to continue their post-secondary studies in French.

Thank you for your attention today.

• (0825)

We will be happy to answer your questions.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Anderson.

Before going any further, I want to say that sound checks were successfully performed for all people participating virtually in the meeting. Everything is therefore in order.

I give the floor to Mr. Thériault for the next five minutes.

**Mr. Simon Thériault (Board President, Fédération de la jeunesse canadienne-française):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, everyone.

As the president of the Fédération de la jeunesse canadienne-française, or FJCF, I am very happy to be with you today to present our position on federal funding for minority-language post-secondary institutions.

I want to say that the lands on which I stand are part of the traditional unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq people.

The FJCF is a national organization managed by and for French-speaking youth in Canada. Our members, youth organizations based in nine provinces and three territories, represent the interests of French-speaking youth from 14 to 25 years old. Our expertise therefore rests on young people's experience, and that is the lens we will use to present our observations to you today.

As you are no doubt aware, choosing a post-secondary institution can be complex. In my case, as a youth from northern New Brunswick, I had limited options if I wanted to attend post-secondary education in French. I could choose to stay home and, in so doing, have very limited access to programs on the satellite campus. I could move to an urban centre in my province. I could even go study in Quebec. My case is certainly not unique. All too often, our communities' youth must travel long distances or even move if they want to continue studying their chosen field in French, and this comes at a significant cost.

Despite all this, I'm speaking to you today from a position of privilege, and I recognize that. In fact, I am lucky. I had friends who had to move to another province to continue their post-secondary education in French. Because the costs associated with moving far from home are much too high for some people, they have to go through a virtual program, or they have nothing at all. Let's be honest: it's not easy to pursue post-secondary education in front of a screen, and many people end up dropping out. For others, linguistic insecurity, limited program offerings or basic unfamiliarity with francophone institutions means that they will simply choose an anglophone institution.

Beyond the choice of programs, youth also care about the services they can access on their campus. Indeed, mental health services, student academic success services and accommodation services are essential to ensure better success and reduce dropout rates. Unfortunately, those services are sometimes too limited or not well known in our institutions.

Recognizing the issues of access for youth who want to pursue their post-secondary education in French, the government of Canada created a scholarship program in 2018 for youth with French as a second language. This program delivered results. However, I can assure you that when it comes to post-secondary education in French, the obstacles encountered by youth with French as a second language are the very same among those for whom French is their mother tongue. It therefore makes absolutely no sense that this scholarship program is not available to the thousands of young people proudly attending one of the 760 French-language schools outside Quebec.

The francophone community spaces we need on campus could also help ensure this transition and build better bridges between the community, institutions and students. These spaces could reinforce the feeling of belonging among French-speaking youth and establish important connections between them. Student life is a major factor when comes the time to choose a post-secondary institution. The network of friends that young people create for themselves contributes to their academic success, as well as to their retention within our institutions and communities.

For many young people, mobility is a need. In fact, it's necessary for their academic success, because it allows them to have varied educational experiences. Mobility also allows youth to learn more about our francophone communities from coast to coast. Imagine what it would be like if our institutions had the resources to work together to ensure students' mobility.

Knowledge development, identity building and engagement are essential for development and, above all, for our francophone minority communities' sustainability. Without a doubt, our communities' post-secondary educational institutions play an essential role in community development. These institutions need strong and sustained support, be it for creating infrastructure, offering more modern and sought-after programs, working together, offering specialized services to their students, or even enhancing student life on campus. Building our post-secondary educational institutions' capacity is a strategic investment the federal government can make in our communities.

Thank you for your attention. I'm available to answer your questions.

• (0830)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Thériault.

Both witnesses kept to their speaking time. They are disciplined. I hope the committee members will be the same.

We are moving on to the first round of questions, during which each political party will have six minutes, starting with the Conservative Party.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor for six minutes.

**Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. We will try to lead by example when it comes to discipline.

Ms. Anderson, Mr. Racine and Mr. Thériault, thank you for being with us this morning.

Allow me to highlight Mr. Thériault's dynamism and enthusiasm. It's inspiring to see a young person get so involved and present such relevant observations. I wanted to say so, because young people are our future.

Ms. Anderson, in your speech, you said that support for parents is urgently needed. In your opinion, what would be the first concrete step that we, as legislators, could take to support parents effectively?

**Ms. Gillian Anderson:** I have teenagers who are 19, 17 and 15 years old, so I am fully immersed in the situation we are talking about.

There's not enough support in schools. Young people don't have enough access to guidance counsellors. For example, my son would like to pursue his studies at the post-secondary level next year, but he's getting no support at all. I'm the one doing all the research. Even though I am well integrated into the francophone community, I lack the references to help him in the way he needs. Conversely, his best friend, who is attending the anglophone school on the other side of the street, has been getting support since Grade 10 and has already chosen his classes for next year. My son hasn't received even a fourth of that support from his school. It is a big problem.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Are they going to the same school?

**Ms. Gillian Anderson:** They go to different schools. The francophone school is on one side of the street and the anglophone school is on the other. Support services offered from one to the next are completely different.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** What province is this?

**Ms. Gillian Anderson:** It's in Alberta.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** So you're saying that in Alberta, in a francophone school, there is no guidance counsellor.

**Ms. Gillian Anderson:** A counsellor is available one day a week. She offers her services to five different high schools in the school board.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** So this situation is hampering the guidance of youth who wish to pursue their studies in French.

**Ms. Gillian Anderson:** Exactly.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** So, in your opinion, increasing services to properly counsel our youth should be a priority. Advice offered by a parent is fine, but sometimes advice that comes from outside is more—

**Ms. Gillian Anderson:** Exactly. Young people need support to plan their post-secondary education. They need to pick the right courses in Grade 10 to suit their chosen path. They need to prepare so that by the end of Grade 12, they have everything they need to continue their studies at the post-secondary level. They should also have a plan B in case they don't get into their program of choice. Who should put this plan B in place? Is it up to me, as a parent? Is it up to the school? There's really no communication or support in this regard.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** If I understood correctly, guidance counselors could be one solution to these problems, but there is a lack of resources.

**Ms. Gillian Anderson:** Yes, there is indeed a lack of resources and funding in French schools.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Do you have access to comprehensive post-secondary programs in French in Alberta?

**Ms. Gillian Anderson:** I'm not sure I understand the question.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Can a young person who wants to study in French in Alberta choose a program that can be taken in French from the outset up to a master's degree?

**Ms. Gillian Anderson:** From preschool up to grade 12, it's possible.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** I meant post-secondary education.

**Ms. Gillian Anderson:** Yes, it's possible at the post-secondary level, but there are few choices. That's another problem.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** So we need to invest more to be able to offer more programs.

**Ms. Gillian Anderson:** Exactly.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Thank you very much.

Mr. Thériault, in your opening remarks, you mentioned a new scholarship program that's been in place for a few years. You said that certain students had access to this program, while others did not. Can you explain this situation to us?

**Mr. Simon Thériault:** Currently, the scholarships are for students with French as a second language who are studying in French. In other words, students who attended French immersion schools or programs. However, the scholarship program is not intended for students who completed their high school education in a French school and whose mother tongue is French.

What we are requesting is a scholarship program that would give young francophones attending French schools access to scholarships to further their studies at a French-language post-secondary institution.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** So you're saying that young people who are in French immersion have access to this program, but that young francophones who want to continue their studies in French—students we don't want to lose to the English-language system—do not have access to the scholarships offered under this new government program.

In what year was this program created?

• (0835)

**Mr. Simon Thériault:** The program was included in the former Action Plan for Official Languages, the 2018–2023 plan.

We're asking for a new scholarship program that would allow young francophones to pursue their post-secondary studies in French, since they face the same challenges.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** As far as you know, that program is not part of the 2023–2028 Action Plan for Official Languages.

**Mr. Simon Thériault:** That's right.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Mr. Thériault, you suggested increasing scholarships or making them more accessible to young people. If I remember correctly, you also mentioned that study programs weren't necessarily accessible or that there weren't enough of them, resulting in the exodus of young people. They have to leave their place of birth or their province, which increases their costs.

We are the legislators. We're here to find the most effective ways. As you know, money doesn't grow on trees. If we had to choose, would we be better off investing in scholarships for youth or in post-secondary institutions to make French-language programs more accessible and diverse?

**The Chair:** That's an excellent question, Mr. Godin, but your six minutes are up. We can come back to it later.

It's now the Liberals' turn. Mr. Samson has the floor for six minutes.

**Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Chair.

I'd like to thank my CNPF colleagues for appearing today. I also thank Mr. Thériault.

Ms. Anderson and Mr. Racine, I must say that the CNPF has always been very close to my heart. So I am delighted to see you here. You mentioned post-secondary education, and I recognize its importance, but early childhood is of great concern to me, too. Your organization has key early childhood goals as well. The role you've played for a long time has helped set French-language schools on the path to success.

My questions will be very brief.

How will the changes made through Bill C-35 help your association?

**Ms. Gillian Anderson:** It's sure to help with student retention in our schools. It will encourage parents to enrol them in our programs in the first place, because there will be far more choices, opportunities and funding for early childhood. These spaces didn't exist in the past. So it's a major improvement for the community. It's part of the continuum.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Ms. Anderson, I'd like to ask you some pointed questions.

If parents don't have access to day care in a French school for their child, do you think they will choose the French school or will they more likely choose an English school?

**Ms. Gillian Anderson:** They will surely choose an English school.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Do you think the lack of school-based day care spots will lead to more assimilation?

**Ms. Gillian Anderson:** Yes, definitely. I couldn't agree more.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** So we're acknowledging that Bill C-35 will improve the situation.

Budget 2024 mentions early childhood. Can you tell us how that will help you?

**Ms. Gillian Anderson:** That will surely create more spaces for parents who want to enrol their children in day care, preschool or early childhood services in French. It's the beginning of the continuum. As they say, it's the base of the pyramid. You have to build a solid base if you want it to go all the way to the top. We're working on each step of that continuum.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** When I was superintendent of a school board in Nova Scotia, we nearly doubled our student population within 10 years by establishing a junior kindergarten program from age 4. Parents from exogamous families were hesitant to enrol their children in French-language schools because they felt their children didn't speak French well enough. Thanks to the creation of the JK program for four-year-olds, which is not officially a school program, links between parents and the school were forged, and parents are now less reticent about enrolling their children there.

Are you seeing this elsewhere in the country?

**Mr. Jean-Luc Racine (Executive Director, Commission nationale des parents francophones):** Yes. We're even hearing from parents who, even though they're both francophone, are forced to enrol their children in English-language daycares. We've seen some concrete cases in Nova Scotia and Alberta, for example. Afterwards, they decide to enrol their children in English-language schools, because they're afraid their children won't be comfortable enough in French to succeed.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** So this is a problem, and we must find a solution.

You have a solution to propose. Your hard work is allowing this very important issue to move forward.

Mr. Thériault, I haven't forgotten you. You're from New Brunswick, aren't you?

• (0840)

**Mr. Simon Thériault:** Yes, that's right.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Wonderful, that's right next to my province. As you well know, I'm from Nova Scotia. New Brunswick and Nova Scotia have worked together a lot on this issue.

You mentioned that Canada now has 760 French-language schools outside Quebec. You know your files well, and that's impressive. When I was in school, there were no French-language schools here. Today, children have access to French-language schools across Canada. As a result, there are far more students in French-language schools. So why aren't we seeing more students from French schools in French universities and post-secondary institutions?

**Mr. Simon Thériault:** That's a very good question. You're asking questions about early childhood and you're pinpointing the right area. The important thing is to recruit young people at the beginning of the continuum, from early childhood, so that they then go to school in French and continue on to high school in French. It's important to keep them in our institutions to ensure that they go on to attend French-language post-secondary institutions. If we lose them at the end of their compulsory schooling, it's a missed opportunity.

Furthermore, many young people decide to pursue their studies in English because they experience language insecurity, a common phenomenon in young people, or because programs are simply not offered in French. French-language post-secondary institutions may also be far from their homes. There are many reasons why young people choose an English-language post-secondary institution over a French-language one, but—

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Mr. Thériault, we could write a whole chapter on the reasons behind such a choice. I know you know the subject very well and I thank you for sharing your experience with us.

I'd like to come back to the suggestion you made to my colleague earlier, namely to provide scholarships encouraging students to choose French-language universities or post-secondary institutions.

In Nova Scotia, for example, it's true that it's not easy to study in French for someone who lives on Isle Madame, the beautiful little island I come from, which is located on the edge of Cape Breton. It's a seven-hour drive to the province's only French-language university. On the other hand, you can choose to attend one of the 15 English-language universities that are closer by. It's discouraging. In my case, I had to study in New Brunswick, a four-hour drive away. It was an easy choice between a four-hour drive and a seven-hour drive.

Can you tell me about that? Have young people raised the issue with ministers? Have you had any discussions? Is this an issue you think should be pursued all the way?

**The Chair:** That's also an excellent question, but—

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Give him at least a moment to respond.

**The Chair:** No, I have to treat everyone equally.

We'll have the opportunity to—

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Mr. Chair, Mr. Samson makes a good point. The witness should be given a chance to answer the question quickly.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** He could answer quickly, in 30 seconds or 20 seconds, or even 10 seconds.

**The Chair:** There will be a second round of questions, if we hurry.

It's now the Bloc's turn. Mr. Beaulieu, you have six minutes.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ):** Thank you, Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for being here.

A long time ago, the Commission nationale des parents francophones commissioned a study entitled "Where did the billions go?" It described the moment when French-language education was banned in every province as crucial. This went on for generations. The bulk of the funding from the Official Languages in Education Program, or OLEP, was given to anglophones in Quebec. I believe they received 47.7% of the funding.

What were the repercussions of that decision? Assimilation was reportedly occurring at a very high rate at the time. Is it still going on, or has there really been a major shift?

**Mr. Jean-Luc Racine:** I couldn't tell you if a shift has occurred. To tell you the truth, it's very difficult to know how provinces spend money on education programs. So it's very difficult to track the funding.

A few years ago, we signed an agreement with Canadian Heritage about strategic funds. The idea was to increase transparency within each province's department of education so we'd know exactly how the money was being spent. To this day, it remains very difficult to find out.

Various studies, including some undertaken by this committee, revealed that funds were diverted in some cases, but I would hope that if such situations are reported, they will occur less often.

The Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones would be in a better position to give you the facts. That said, there's still much work to be done to learn exactly how the funds are being spent.

• (0845)

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** My next question is for both organizations.

I saw a study that showed that French-language university education outside Quebec was underfunded, given the proportion of francophones outside Quebec.

Do you think funding for university education outside Quebec is very important and should be increased?

**Ms. Gillian Anderson:** Yes, absolutely. There aren't enough French-language institutions and there aren't enough programs in the ones that do exist. So any investment to increase the number of programs and spaces would be welcome.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** What do you think, Mr. Thériault?

**Mr. Simon Thériault:** Our answer is the same. We see glaring problems in our minority post-secondary institutions. For example, there are fewer spaces available than in English-language post-secondary institutions. There are also few choices. As a result, students have to travel greater distances and incur additional costs. What's more, student life may be less appealing at institutions in minority settings than at English-language post-secondary institutions.

Minority post-secondary institutions must be adequately funded to try to address these glaring problems in our communities.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** The situation as it stands now seems quite dire. It's evident that post-secondary institutions are chronically underfunded. As such, shouldn't some degree of balance be restored?

The current situation bears some resemblance to the days when a large portion of funding was channelled to Quebec's English-language institutions. We still see this today. The portion of funding allocated to English-language universities by the Quebec government is more than double the anglophones' share of the population. What's more, Quebec anglophone universities receive 35% to 40% of federal research funding. In the meantime, francophone post-secondary institutions outside Quebec are chronically underfunded.

Shouldn't some balance be restored?

**Mr. Jean-Luc Racine:** There should undeniably be a better balance.

I would like to share an important piece of data with you. Roughly 63% of our young people come from exogamous families. I spoke with one father who told me that, while things with his wife were generally going well, a great dispute broke out in his family

when it came time to talk about their children's education. Why? Because that topic always presents a dilemma. The anglophone parent wants to consider anglophone universities, which are closer and less costly. The francophone parent, meanwhile, insists on the importance of sticking with French-language education. Do you see? Education is dividing families. Why is this the case? Because there aren't enough programs to allow our young people to study in French.

That being said, I would like to add one small comment. A huge number of young people who chose to study in a French-language post-secondary institution told me that they did so not because of their French-speaking parent, but rather their English-speaking parent. In other words, the more the English-speaking parent is open to French-language education, the more their child will be encouraged to enrol in a French-speaking post-secondary institution. Many young people confirmed this to me. I was shocked to learn this.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** That's what the research shows.

**The Chair:** Mr. Beaulieu, you have 20 seconds remaining.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** Some people say that this isn't a zero-sum game, and that the funding for francophone or anglophone universities has no impact on whether people will choose to study in francophone or anglophone institutions. What are your thoughts on this?

**The Chair:** Please answer in five seconds or less.

**Ms. Gillian Anderson:** I would say that a major need exists.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Colleagues, like me, you have a cell phone or a similar device with a clock built in. As such, I would ask you to respect the established speaking times so that we may have as many rounds of questions as possible.

Mr. Beaulieu, rest assured that I'm not targeting you in particular.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** No, but you did target me.

**The Chair:** Yes, I certainly targeted you, Mr. Samson.

We'll continue our journey towards Alberta with a stop in Manitoba, where we can find our NDP representative.

Ms. Ashton, the floor is yours for six minutes.

**Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's a stop at the halfway point of our journey.

I want to welcome the witnesses and thank them for their testimony.

Ms. Anderson, I'll begin with you. You shared some similar experiences to what families here in Manitoba are facing.

I wanted to focus specifically on a topic raised by almost every witness in this study, which is the impact of the labour shortage on education. There's a teacher shortage in French-speaking schools and French immersion programs as well as throughout the entire school system.

Could you speak to us about the situation in Alberta? How is the labour shortage in your community? What impact does this have on French-language education for your young people?

● (0850)

**Ms. Gillian Anderson:** In my community, there's a teacher shortage, no matter the language. We don't have enough teachers, period.

Of course, we're here to talk about French in minority situations. That being said, in my opinion, to solve the labour shortage problem in the education sector, we need to find a new strategy to encourage young people to choose a career in education. Currently, nothing is pushing them to choose this profession, which isn't well recognized. As I mentioned before, I have three teenagers. None of them want to become a teacher. It doesn't attract them.

Our society has changed a lot. We need to find a better way to support future teachers in universities and manage the new reality. Parents are much more involved than they were before, which is a good thing. However, it creates a challenge for teachers. Not everyone wants to deal with parents like I do.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Do you think that the labour shortage has an impact on the stability of education, by preventing burnout in educators, creating a more stable environment and encouraging more collegiality in schools?

Do you think that we need to address the labour shortage in the education sector?

Should the federal government be tasked with this work?

**Ms. Gillian Anderson:** Any effort to retain teachers in our schools would be most welcome.

I have found that teachers are resigning from our schools because there's a high level of competition between school boards. If we compare English-language school boards with French-language school boards, we can see that it almost always pays more to work for an English-language school. On top of this, these schools offer more career paths and advancement opportunities.

Continuing to teach in a French-language school is a good thing if you care deeply about the future of the community and the language. However, at the end of the day, in the current economic situation, money is a strong motivator. We often lose teachers who move to English-language school boards because they offer higher pay. That's the challenge we have to face.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** In previous committee meetings, representatives of post-secondary institutions have emphasized that stable and adequate funding is essential to their work.

As the head of the Commission nationale des parents francophones in Alberta, do you agree with this clear recommendation from francophone institutions?

Do you think such funding could help solve the labour shortage problems, in particular?

**Ms. Gillian Anderson:** I have every confidence that it can. The more money that goes into our post-secondary institutions, the better it will be for our young people. I do a lot of work in the community. When I ask francophones if they know that there are 22 Canadian francophone post-secondary institutions outside Quebec, they're surprised. They can't name more than two.

More money should be invested so that we can promote existing programs and add new ones. The goal is to make these institutions more attractive. Guidance counsellors would be in a better position to inform young people about existing institutions and encourage them to continue their studies in French.

We are working very hard to keep our children in a francophone program. I still have to fight for my child to continue his studies in French. That's what he wants too, but I don't have any options for him. It's very sad.

● (0855)

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Thank you for your testimony, Ms. Anderson. I think we're all moved by your comments.

Mr. Thériault, thank you very much for your testimony. Your organization does essential work to raise awareness of the challenges faced by young francophones.

I also know how important a number of the programs you offered in the past were. I'm thinking in particular of the government internship program for francophones. The fact that the program no longer exists concerns me a great deal.

We are talking here about ways to encourage young people to work and live in French.

What is the impact of the lack of government internships in French on francophone students in Canada?

How does this shortage affect their entry into the job market and the vitality of francophone communities across the country?

**The Chair:** That's an excellent question, Ms. Ashton, but you are 25 seconds over your time. All members of the committee seem a bit unruly today.

Mr. Thériault, you may have an opportunity to answer the question later.

We will now begin a second round of questions. I'm going to ask everyone to stick to their speaking time so that more members can ask questions. Please watch the clock.

Mr. Dalton, you have the floor for five minutes.

**Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC):** Mr. Thériault and Ms. Anderson, thank you very much for your comments. Your testimony is very important to us.

It's good to hear your voices. If you don't tell us about the challenges you face, we won't be able to find solutions.

Ms. Anderson, I'm from British Columbia. Could you tell us more about the Commission nationale des parents francophones, in Alberta and elsewhere?

**Ms. Gillian Anderson:** Our organization has members from every province and territory in Canada. These members represent their local francophone parents. We have a representative from British Columbia, who is the treasurer of the CNPF executive.

Everybody shares stories and talks about what's going on where they live, and I can assure you that the same thing is happening across the country. The only province that is not represented in our organization is Quebec, since we represent francophone parents in minority language communities.

**Mr. Marc Dalton:** Thank you.

I looked online and found out that there were four francophone school boards in Alberta.

How are they funded? Is it primarily provincial funding with a small contribution from the federal government?

**Ms. Gillian Anderson:** I don't know exactly how the funding is divided up between the federal and provincial governments, but the four francophone school boards in Alberta are funded like the anglophone school boards.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** They are essentially funded by the provincial government.

**Ms. Gillian Anderson:** Yes, that's right.

**Mr. Marc Dalton:** Okay.

I'm a teacher by trade, having taught high school and elementary school. I'm a little surprised to hear you say that only a quarter of the resources are intended for francophone students. It's a little discouraging.

Are you talking mainly about francophone school boards, or are you also referring to public schools that offer immersion programs?

**Ms. Gillian Anderson:** I'm talking about our French-language school back home. For example, a guidance counsellor comes in once a week. The school board has five high schools, so she spends one day a week in each of the schools.

Since the funding comes mainly from the province, the school boards are responsible for identifying needs and making the necessary investments to meet them. However, if they don't have enough money to meet all the needs, it's a challenge for them.

Francophone minorities face a number of challenges wherever we are, especially in Alberta and British Columbia. One is that we don't have enough money to get the resources we need.

**Mr. Marc Dalton:** I know that in British Columbia, for example, they provide additional special grants based on the specific needs of students.

What you're saying is that in Alberta, there is no additional funding to meet the needs.

Is that correct?

• (0900)

**Ms. Gillian Anderson:** The funding works the same way. However, with the money for francophone programs, we have to do twice as much, as compared with anglophone programs.

**Mr. Marc Dalton:** You also represent parents and families. Can you tell us more about the frustrations of francophone and Francophile parents who still want their children to be raised in a French-speaking environment and enrol them in immersion programs? What are the challenges they face?

**Ms. Gillian Anderson:** I am one of those parents myself. My husband is an anglophone. He doesn't speak a word of French. We've been together for 20 years, so he doesn't exactly pick up French quickly.

As a result, the entire task of raising our children in French in a minority setting rests on my shoulders. It's not always easy. I have a life partner, but when it comes to educating our children in French and exposing them to francophone culture, I am all alone.

**Mr. Marc Dalton:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** You have 30 seconds.

**Mr. Marc Dalton:** Okay.

Mr. Thériault, the range of programs institutions offer is based on their enrolment, and they depend on those students to fund their programs. However, students don't enrol if there aren't enough programs. It's like the chicken and the egg.

**The Chair:** You have five seconds left.

**Mr. Marc Dalton:** Do you have a solution to propose, in five seconds?

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Simon Thériault:** The scholarship program could be a solution, but it's mainly a matter of adequately funding our institutions.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Thériault. Sorry, but our usually excellent committee members are a bit unruly today.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** You're lucky the chair let you answer.

**The Chair:** Mr. Iacono, you have the floor for five minutes.

**Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, colleagues.

I thank the witnesses for being with us this morning.

Ms. Anderson, how much federal money does your institution receive for French-language research?

**Ms. Gillian Anderson:** That's a good question.

I'll let Mr. Racine, executive director of the commission, answer it.

**Mr. Jean-Luc Racine:** You want to know how much money we receive at the Commission nationale des parents francophones.

Is that correct, Mr. Iacono?

**Mr. Angelo Iacono:** Yes, that's right.

**Mr. Jean-Luc Racine:** For research, we don't currently receive any funding. The funds we do receive are for programming. In this way, we support our member associations in the deployment of services and support for parents.

We have no funds in our budget for research as such.

**Mr. Angelo Iacono:** How much would you require?

**Mr. Jean-Luc Racine:** As far as research is concerned, we would need to know the evolution of the number of rights holders. The census data on rights holders was published in 2021, and we know how many rights holders we currently have.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** You don't know what that number will be in the years to come.

**Mr. Jean-Luc Racine:** That's exactly it.

We also need to know how this will evolve. We're welcoming more and more French-speaking immigrants, more and more rights holders. We were surprised by the data.

We really need to do research to find out what kind of infrastructure we need not only at the primary and secondary levels, but also at the post-secondary level to be able to meet the demand over the next few years.

**Mr. Angelo Iacono:** Are you aware of the sources of funding that are available provincially?

**Mr. Jean-Luc Racine:** From province to province, funding varies enormously. As mentioned earlier, in British Columbia, the province gives some money to the Fédération des parents francophones. In Alberta, there's virtually nothing.

**Mr. Angelo Iacono:** Are you approaching the provinces for funding?

**Mr. Jean-Luc Racine:** We do it all the time.

**Mr. Angelo Iacono:** Thank you.

Mr. Thériault, from your side, do you know how much federal funding there is for French-language research?

**Mr. Simon Thériault:** Our organization does not receive funding to do research. We're a community-based organization.

As for institutions, I couldn't provide you with an answer, unfortunately.

**Mr. Angelo Iacono:** All right.

What is the profile of the students who attend your organization? Are most of them from the region? Do you attract French-speaking students from across the country?

What is the demographic profile of your students?

**Mr. Simon Thériault:** Our organization has members in nine provinces and the three territories. So they come from all over the

country. We represent people from francophone and immersion schools. Others come from immigrant backgrounds.

We have a bit of a pulse on people from very diverse backgrounds within our organization.

• (0905)

**Mr. Angelo Iacono:** Thank you.

Ms. Anderson, I'm going to ask you the same question.

What is the demographic profile of students in your organization?

**Ms. Gillian Anderson:** We work mostly with parents, and they represent a wide variety of backgrounds. They come from a variety of countries and professional backgrounds. There really is a great diversity within our organization.

**Mr. Angelo Iacono:** Earlier, you talked about your needs. You said several times that your funding was insufficient.

What amount would be sufficient to meet your needs?

As we don't have any figures, it's a little difficult for us to fully grasp your situation.

**Ms. Gillian Anderson:** The question should be put to the post-secondary institutions. They're the ones who could tell us how much money they need to improve programs, offer more of them and encourage young people to continue their studies in French.

As for parents, I'd like to see more investment in this area. However, as I'm not a school board member, I don't know how much it would cost to staff every school with a full-time guidance counselor. Even if it were only part-time, it would be a big change from what we have now.

**Mr. Angelo Iacono:** What else do you need?

If we want this issue to move forward, we need to better understand what the needs are and how much it will cost to meet them. These are two very important elements. We need to know more before we go to all levels of government.

Could you provide information to committee members in this regard?

I'll then put the same question to Mr. Thériault.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Iacono.

That's an excellent question, but perhaps we can come back to it later.

For now, I'm going to give the floor to Mr. Beaulieu for two and a half minutes.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** Ms. Anderson, I didn't have time to get answers to my last question.

Some people say that funding the French-language university network doesn't really matter in terms of the survival of French, because it's not a zero-sum game.

What do you think?

**Ms. Gillian Anderson:** I strongly disagree.

The more we fund post-secondary programs in French, the more young people will be attracted to them.

There's not enough choice, and that doesn't encourage them to continue their studies in French. If they don't want to become nurses or teachers or go to eastern Canada to take the program they're interested in in French to become, say, lawyers or engineers, they're forced to continue their studies in English in western Canada.

**Mr. Jean-Luc Racine:** I would also add that many parents decide to send their children to an English-language school in high school to prepare them for post-secondary education, because they think it will be in English.

The French-language high school system is losing a lot of young people because of the lack of supply at the post-secondary level. This is another important factor to consider.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** Mr. Thériault, do you have anything to add?

**Mr. Simon Thériault:** Indeed, that is a reality we have to face.

There are students who go to high school in a French-language school, or even a French immersion school, and who don't have access to a French-language program at the post-secondary level. They can then end up losing the use of the language.

This is a reality we often see in New Brunswick. People come out of a French immersion school, go to an English-language post-secondary institution, and then end up losing the use of French.

Young people who can continue their education in our French-language post-secondary institutions are more likely to stay in our communities, work there and contribute to their vitality.

It is therefore very important to adequately fund our post-secondary institutions.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** So you agree that it's important to devote a larger share of funding to francophone universities. It's not a zero-sum game.

Right?

**Mr. Simon Thériault:** Of course, it's very important. French-language post-secondary institutions need more funding.

• (0910)

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** Among...

**The Chair:** You have less than 10 seconds left.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** All right.

Among the things you mentioned, Mr. Thériault, I find the question of scholarships for students who want to study in French really interesting. Thank you for that comment.

I won't have time to ask you a question about that, but I think it would be important for us to talk about it in our report.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

Ms. Ashton, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Thank you.

Mr. Thériault, at the end of my last turn, I mentioned the federal French internship program for youth, a program you managed in the past.

What are the consequences of the fact that this program no longer exists? Should the federal government reinvest in such a program?

**Mr. Simon Thériault:** Youth employability is obviously a big challenge. The cost of living is rising all the time. So it's very important that young people have access to jobs in French in our communities. We can see that jobs are available, but they're not always well known. They're not promoted.

We need to set up an internship program that highlights existing jobs or creates new jobs for young people. This could help them meet the ever-increasing cost of education. This has a huge impact, as some students drop out of school when they can't afford the costs involved.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Do you believe that such a program is coherent and reflects the vision of supporting the francophone post-secondary sector and investing in opportunities to live and work in French?

**Mr. Simon Thériault:** These are obviously programs that are very important. They're part of the post-secondary environment.

For francophone students who don't have the financial means to study, there must be jobs in French. Think of the foreign students who come to study at our institutions and can't work in English, because they don't speak the language. For them, working in a predominantly English-speaking environment is difficult.

So we need to make jobs available in French to enable these students to work in French.

**The Chair:** You have five seconds left, Ms. Ashton.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** I'll be brief.

Mr. Thériault, do you agree that post-secondary institutions should be able to count on stable, predictable and adequate funding?

**Mr. Simon Thériault:** Yes, we agree and support the recommendation of the Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne, or ACUFC, to increase funding to \$80 million per year for post-secondary institutions.

**The Chair:** Thank you, witnesses.

Before we move on to our next witnesses, I'd like to ask Ms. Anderson a question.

Ms. Anderson, in your opening remarks, you said that half of the curriculum or courses—I'm not sure I understood—came from the University of Ottawa.

Is that correct?

**Ms. Gillian Anderson:** Yes, that's right.

**The Chair:** Do you mean at home in Alberta?

**Ms. Gillian Anderson:** No, I mean the whole program.

**Mr. Jean-Luc Racine:** What we're saying is that, of all the programs, half of those available in French come from the University of Ottawa, according to the study we consulted.

**The Chair:** So you mean for all universities and colleges outside Quebec.

Is that correct?

**Mr. Jean-Luc Racine:** Yes, that's right.

**The Chair:** All right.

Mr. Thériault, what town in New Brunswick are you originally from?

**Mr. Simon Thériault:** From Grand Falls, New Brunswick.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Mr. Samson, get out of that body.

**The Chair:** It's not that far from home.

I've had the unfortunate task of having to cut short a lot of questions and answers because I have the eternally unruly here. They're also passionate about the language, and want to talk longer than their allotted time.

Dear witnesses, this has been really fascinating. Please feel free to write to us with any additional information you'd like to share.

I won't ask you to write a doctoral thesis on one of Mr. Samson's speeches, but it's true that Mr. Samson's reflections on the fact that we can't dissociate post-secondary education from early childhood appeal to all of us around the table.

In fact, how is it that after so many years, when there are more and more francophone schools outside Quebec, post-secondary institutions are having difficulty filling their classes and receiving enrolments from francophones?

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** They were not allowed to respond.

**The Chair:** It is true that that can't be answered in five minutes.

Witnesses, thank you again for your participation. Please forward any additional information to the clerk. The clerk will then distribute it to all committee members. This will form part of our analysis when we draft our report.

I temporarily suspend the meeting to bring in our next witnesses.

• (0910) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (0915)

**The Chair:** We are back in session.

We now welcome the witnesses who have been invited for the second hour of the meeting.

We have with us Ms. Bouffard, rector of the Université de Saint-Boniface.

Ms. Bouffard, I believe this is your second appearance before the Standing Committee on Official Languages. Welcome.

• (0920)

**Ms. Sophie Bouffard (President, Université de Saint-Boniface):** This is indeed my second appearance.

[English]

**The Chair:** We also have with us the Quebec English-Speaking Communities Research Network. I think your acronym is QUE-SCREN. It's your first time, I think, and we're glad to have you here at this committee for the first time.

How it works is that the first round of questions will be interactive, with questions and answers, and with six minutes for each political party.

**An hon. member:** *Vous parlez anglais?*

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

[Translation]

**The Chair:** So that's how it's going to be. Before that, we'll give each witness a chance to make a presentation of no more than five minutes.

I'm really very strict about speaking time. Keeping to the time limit will allow us to have two rounds of questioning. This will allow members to ask more questions.

Ms. Bouffard, you have the floor for five minutes.

**Ms. Sophie Bouffard:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank the committee for welcoming me and for conducting this study which is important for the sustainability of francophone communities in minority settings.

My name is Sophie Bouffard, and I have the privilege of being the rector of the Université de Saint-Boniface, or USB.

The USB is the only French-language university in western Canada and the only French-language post-secondary institution in Manitoba. It is also Manitoba's smallest and least expensive institution. A hybrid institution, with a dual mandate of college and university training, the USB is the last rung on the educational continuum for French as a first and second language in Manitoba. This educational continuum is the backbone of Manitoba's francophonie. The USB works in synergy with the community and its network of community organizations.

The USB offers nearly thirty programs of study, and welcomes close to 1,450 students, 79% of whom are Canadians or permanent residents and 21%, international students. The Continuing Education Division offers non-credit courses, for which there are over 4,000 registrations.

In Manitoba, USB is the supplier of bilingual professionals needed in fields such as education, health, the public service, community organizations and the private sector. The institution also contributes to its community through research and other activities, and is part of the larger francophone immigration project.

The États généraux sur le postsecondaire en contexte francophone minoritaire confirmed the particular additional mission that a minority institution like USB must take on, namely to maintain the language and preserve the culture, in addition to ensuring a strong francophonie and the advancement of bilingualism within Canadian society.

My brief is intended to highlight the federal government's responsibility and the urgent need for action on funding. At USB, we must emphasize the significant lack of economies of scale due to our small size. It is extremely difficult to maintain a balanced budget and remain competitive in a high-inflation environment in order to preserve our quality programs, offer services tailored to students, equip ourselves with modern work tools and overcome the increasingly costly challenges associated with aging and outdated infrastructure.

In 2023-24, recurrent federal funding for the Official Languages in Education Program, which had been frozen since 2008, now represents just 5% of our annual operating budget. Our purchasing power has therefore declined significantly over the past 16 years.

For the past several years, available federal funding has essentially been in the form of one-time funds, which poses major challenges, since post-secondary education is a long-term endeavour. Accountability for these funds is cumbersome and our very small teams are terribly overburdened, not to mention the difficulty of securing a provincial match.

If time permits, I could talk more about the educational continuum, the equivalent of which doesn't exist on the English side, and the enviable fact that our recruitment pool is growing significantly year on year, success that is nevertheless undermined by a devastating dropout rate. There's nothing inevitable or irreversible about this situation. It only highlights the fact that we are underfunded, and that the development of French-language education in a minority context cannot be left to chance.

We need to be able to improve program offerings as well as the range of student services, have the means to act to counter language insecurity and more in order to achieve real equality. A development plan for USB with stable and predictable funding is necessary if we are to begin to correct the dropout rate we are experiencing within the continuum, and if we are serious about Canadian bilingualism. The challenge is systemic, and the USB is well positioned, along with its educational and community partners, to propose innovative and sustainable solutions that will offer a better return on investment in education, with multiple positive spin-offs for Manitoba's and Canada's francophonie.

In Manitoba, as you can imagine, USB is the only post-secondary institution that systematically produces and seeks to produce graduates with a professional level of bilingualism. This is a major contribution. Our programs of study are therefore of strategic importance.

We support the recommendations that the ACUFC and the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne, or FCFA, have presented to the committee. However, I would like to reiterate the ACUFC's recommendation, which in my opinion is the most pressing element, namely that the federal government make a com-

mitment by investing \$80 million per year in additional recurring funding for post-secondary institutions in the francophone minority.

We're not asking for charity. We are the community development tool through which it will be possible to ensure the sustainability of the Canadian francophonie, the keystone on which bilingualism in this country rests.

Thank you for your attention.

• (0925)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Bouffard.

[*English*]

From QUESCREN, we have Lorraine O'Donnell, senior research associate and adviser, here with Patrick Donovan, research associate and adviser.

I don't know who is going to speak for the five minutes. Is it Ms. O'Donnell?

**Dr. Lorraine O'Donnell (Senior Research Associate and Advisor, Quebec English-Speaking Communities Research Network):** I will, yes.

**The Chair:** The floor is yours for five minutes. Go ahead.

**Dr. Lorraine O'Donnell:** Thank you for the invitation to appear today.

The federal Official Languages Act calls on the federal government to support OLMC vitality. Research is essential for actors and stakeholders to make evidence-based decisions that ensure OLMC vitality.

As the the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages stated, "The vitality of a community emerges from the assumption that it takes charge of its own development." Must not this empowerment be based on better knowledge of themselves?

Today there are about a million Quebeckers whose first official language is English. This OLMC population, which makes important contributions to Quebec and Canada, is largely bilingual, well integrated in Quebec and committed to linguistic duality and bridging solitudes.

Nevertheless, research shows that this OLMC faces significant vitality challenges, including poverty, unemployment, high youth out-migration, barriers in access to services and being perceived as a threat to the vitality of Quebec's francophone majority. Research-based evidence is required to support our OLMC's vitality. To this end, the Quebec Community Groups Network recently recommended that the federal government invest in university-based research on English-speaking Quebec.

For francophone OLMCs, there is a large and complex research ecosystem. It includes approximately 13 research centres, including the Canadian Institute for Research on Linguistic Minorities, which was established in 2002 through a \$10-million federal government endowment. The CIRLM used to provide \$25,000 in annual funds to QUESCREN, funding that ended this March.

The ecosystem on francophone OLMCs also includes approximately 24 research chairs. This said, we acknowledge—and witnesses have said today—that the research ecosystem focused on francophone OLMCs faces challenges, including, of course, a predominance of English in academic scholarship.

The research ecosystem on English-speaking Quebec, on the other hand, has a different structure and challenges. For one thing, as a recent study by my colleagues Patrick Donovan, who is here today, and Shannon Bell indicates, the whole Quebec university sector is underfunded.

They also identified a misconception that Quebec's English-language universities receive more provincial funding than French-language ones. This misconception represents an obstacle to fruitful discussion about funding.

Also, supporting research on English-speaking Quebec has been less central to Quebec English-language university mandates. There are no research chairs on English-speaking Quebec, and there is only one research centre, QUESCEN. Housed at Concordia University, QUESCEN promotes the understanding and vitality of English-speaking Quebec through research, knowledge mobilization and other activities. Support for it comes from the Secrétariat aux relations avec les Québécois d'expression anglaise of the Government of Quebec, from Canadian Heritage and from Concordia.

Challenges to QUESCEN, which is the sole centre for research on English-speaking Quebec, shed light on challenges to the entire research ecosystem on the topic of English-speaking Quebec. Our challenges include limited funding that is also annual as opposed to continuing.

QUESCEN calls on the federal government to provide increased and sustained funding for both university-based research and the post-secondary research ecosystem that is focused on our OLMC. By doing so, the government would support both knowledge production and the infrastructures, such as universities and colleges, that are essential elements of a vital OLMC in Quebec.

● (0930)

[Translation]

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Dr. O'Donnell.

We will now begin the first round of questions. Each political party will have six minutes to ask questions and get answers. It will be interactive.

I'm very strict about time. I'm being told that I will have to let you know when you have 30 seconds left.

We'll begin with the first vice-chair of the committee, Mr. Godin, from the Conservative Party.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for being with us this morning. We appreciate that.

My first questions will be more for the representatives of the Quebec English-Speaking Communities Research Network. I will ask them all at once.

Dr. O'Donnell, do you recognize that French is in decline across Canada?

**Dr. Lorraine O'Donnell:** Yes.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Do you recognize that French is in decline, even in Quebec?

**Dr. Lorraine O'Donnell:** That's a very complex question.

If we're talking about the number of speakers whose mother tongue is French, French is indeed in decline.

As for the use of French in Quebec, according to a recent study by the Office québécois de la langue française, or OQLF, it remains stable. It's very complex, and I'm not an expert on that.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Thank you, Dr. O'Donnell.

However, we could say that French is not on the rise in Quebec.

Is that correct?

**Dr. Lorraine O'Donnell:** I have good news on this point, since more and more anglophones have become bilingual—

**Mr. Joël Godin:** I'm sorry to interrupt you, but I don't have a lot of speaking time.

Is it safe to say that French in Quebec is not on the rise?

**Dr. Lorraine O'Donnell:** As I said, the issue is too complex for me to speak to.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Thank you, Dr. O'Donnell.

I'd like us to talk about federal funding, and I emphasize the word "federal", for English-language institutions compared to French-language institutions in official language minority communities.

Can you give me the proportions?

**Dr. Lorraine O'Donnell:** I can tell you about our centre. As I said, I can't compare it all, but what I can compare—

**Mr. Joël Godin:** What I understand is you don't have the answer, Dr. O'Donnell.

Is that correct?

**Dr. Lorraine O'Donnell:** I have the answer for our centre.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** I understand, Dr. O'Donnell. You can't know the situation across Canada. That's very legitimate. I don't mean to put you on the spot.

If you have the information or if your research service can provide it to us, I would urge you to send it to our clerk, who will forward it to us.

My next question is about the structure of your organization. Who created your network?

**Dr. Lorraine O'Donnell:** It was established with funding that the federal government had provided to the Canadian Institute for Research on Linguistic Minorities, or CIRLM, located at the Université de Moncton. In the beginning, there was a partnership between Concordia University and the CIRLM to secure our funding.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Today, your organization is, I would say, housed. I'll put it that way first and see what ties you have with Concordia University.

Are your offices physically located at Concordia University?

**Dr. Lorraine O'Donnell:** Yes.

My colleague Patrick Donovan will respond to that.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** I think I got my answer. I understand that the offices of your network are physically located at Concordia University.

**Dr. Lorraine O'Donnell:** Yes.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Do you represent a lot of organizations, educational institutions?

• (0935)

**Mr. Patrick Donovan (Research Associate and Advisor, Quebec English-Speaking Communities Research Network):** Our research network comprises about 80 researchers, and a third of those researchers are francophone. We have researchers interested in English-speaking communities who come from a number of universities in Quebec, Canada and internationally.

So at Concordia, we do work with a lot of universities, not in isolation.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** So your organization doesn't represent Concordia University or argue in its favour.

Is that correct?

**Mr. Patrick Donovan:** No.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Like all the other institutions, you'll probably tell us that you are in need of funding. However, in Quebec alone, what proportion of federal funding goes to French-language institutions versus English-language institutions?

Can you give me a brief outline?

**Mr. Patrick Donovan:** I don't have the data on federal funding. However, according to the data on provincial funding, funding per student is the same at all universities, English-language and French-language alike.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Okay.

You understand that we're at the federal level here and I'd have appreciated an answer about federal funding. If you're able to provide that to us, it would be greatly appreciated.

We thank you for your availability.

Ms. Bouffard, I will now turn to you. You say that your institution is the smallest and least expensive French-language institution. What are you basing that on?

**Ms. Sophie Bouffard:** It's the smallest and least expensive French-language institution in Manitoba, not of all such institutions across the country.

USB is the only French-language institution in Manitoba, but it's the least costly of all Manitoba's postsecondary institutions, all languages combined.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Is it the least costly institution because it's underfunded?

**The Chair:** You have 40 seconds left.

**Ms. Sophie Bouffard:** Yes, USB costs less because it receives less funding. Funding is granted based on urban thinking, in a way, whereas the reality is quite different.

If you look at rural institutions, they are—

**Mr. Joël Godin:** I'm sorry to interrupt.

What economic impact do francophone immigration and foreign students have on your university?

**Ms. Sophie Bouffard:** Foreign students make up 21% of our student body, and that's quite a sizable portion. In terms of tuition fees—

**Mr. Joël Godin:** I'm going to interrupt you.

What does the future look like to you?

**The Chair:** Mr. Godin, thank you very much.

Thank you, Ms. Bouffard.

We can come back to this question later.

For the second of questions we go to the Liberal Party and Annie Koutrakis.

You have the floor for six minutes, Annie.

**Ms. Annie Koutrakis (Vimy, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

My thanks to all the witnesses for joining us today.

I'll start with Dr. O'Donnell.

[English]

Thank you for being here.

Section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms does not guarantee the right to post-secondary education in a minority language.

To your knowledge, are there any guarantees in provincial and territorial legislation for post-secondary education in the minority language?

**Dr. Lorraine O'Donnell:** There are none that I know of.

**Ms. Annie Koutrakis:** Thank you for that.

The new Official Languages Act includes provisions to enhance accountability for transfer payments from the Government of Canada to the provinces and territories.

Have those provisions improved practices at both levels of government, to your knowledge?

**Dr. Lorraine O'Donnell:** My apologies, but I am not here to reflect on the entire university sector. I really hope that the university presidents representing English-language universities in Quebec get the chance to present this type of information to your committee.

**Ms. Annie Koutrakis:** If you had to provide us with one solid recommendation for our study, from your perspective, what would that look like?

**Dr. Lorraine O'Donnell:** We would like to see the research ecosystem—the networks of universities, colleges, professors, students and others who do research on Quebec's official language minority communities—receive steady, ongoing support so that we can answer the kinds of questions that are being asked today, which we're unable to answer due to funding that is not continuous and that is hard for us to depend on from year to year.

**Ms. Annie Koutrakis:** Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Bouffard, federal funding is important, but the provinces must also get involved. You already mentioned that in your comments.

Does the province provide you with less funding than institutions serving the linguistic majority receive?

Do you know the proportions? What's the gap between the two?

**Ms. Sophie Bouffard:** We'd have to look at our financial statements and compare them institution by institution.

We've noticed that, in our case, provincial funding makes up just shy of 60% of our budget. For universities in urban areas, it's around 50%.

In rural areas, in the case of Brandon University, for example, the percentage is higher.

The most important thing is getting stable minimum funding. We need to provide a basic set of services. There's a basic cost, plus the rest.

It's hard to make comparisons, because we have other challenges. We need to provide additional services, and we need to adapt them.

● (0940)

**Ms. Annie Koutrakis:** Thank you.

I'm going to ask you the same question I asked Dr. O'Donnell.

In your opinion, if there were one recommendation to make and it turned out to be the most important one for our study, what would that look like?

**Ms. Sophie Bouffard:** I talked about recurring funding. We would need something stable to continue to build the system and these post-secondary institutions. That's what we need.

I know you're looking into accountability. That's important as well. If I may say so, multiple layers of discussions must take place between the institutions, the province and the federal government. Also, all kinds of dynamics come into play.

I could provide more information if you wish.

**Ms. Annie Koutrakis:** Like everyone here, like my colleagues, I know it all starts with funding, but I think a lot of other issues pose challenges.

What other challenges could the federal government help with to make things better?

**Ms. Sophie Bouffard:** It still comes down to funding. You heard the recommendation about scholarships for students from our French-language schools in the Franco-Manitoban School Division.

We also need to be able to offer programs. Some of our young people who want to study engineering, medicine or law choose to study in English at another institutions.

I think there are ways to work in a network. The francophonie has seen some great successes, especially the Consortium national de formation en santé.

There are solutions and different ways of doing things. We're ready to find solutions. We can do it.

**Ms. Annie Koutrakis:** Thank you, Ms. Bouffard.

Dr. O'Donnell or Mr. Donovan, do you want to add any comments?

[*English*]

**Dr. Lorraine O'Donnell:** Yes. I would like to address a general perception.

One of the issues that Patrick and I face as historians working on the topic of English-speaking Quebec is that, unfortunately, there's a prevalent and much outdated perspective that English-speaking Quebec is a privileged group that doesn't need support. In fact, although we don't worry about the vitality of our language, we have grave concerns about the vitality of our communities. As I mentioned, poverty, unemployment and out-migration, which affect our continuum of English-language education, are grave concerns.

When we ask for support for research on our OLMC, it's a very grounded request based on the realities that come to our attention every day at our job.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thanks, Ms. O'Donnell.

[*Translation*]

I now turn over the floor to the Bloc Québécois, more specifically to the second vice-chair of the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

Mr. Beaulieu, you have the floor for six minutes.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question is for the representatives of the Quebec English-Speaking Communities Research Network.

Do you agree that, in the past, up until the 1960s, francophones were victims of economic discrimination?

**Mr. Patrick Donovan:** Yes, we absolutely agree.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** Also, do you agree that English-language institutions were substantially overfunded?

**Mr. Patrick Donovan:** I don't know if they were overfunded, but they did have a bigger budget at one time.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** In the early 1960s—

**The Chair:** One moment, Mr. Beaulieu. I'll stop the clock.

Mr. Donovan, can you raise your mike to make it easier for the interpreters?

With that, I'll restart the clock.

Mr. Beaulieu, you may continue.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** In the early 1960s, English-language universities received 28.5% of the funding to Quebec universities.

In 1994-95, the federal government allocated 36.7% of funding to English-language universities in Quebec.

According to the latest data on research funding, 35% to 40% of funding is now going to English-language universities in Quebec.

Don't you think that's a little outrageous?

• (0945)

**Mr. Patrick Donovan:** No, I don't think it's outrageous. In any event, I don't see why you're talking about the 1960s, since it's now 2024.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** My question was about the funding in 2017. I believe those are the most recent figures, but the experts who will be testifying can confirm that.

English-language universities receive four times more funding, perhaps even more, than the demographic weight of anglophones would warrant. In your opinion, that's not enough and there should be more.

Is that right?

**Mr. Patrick Donovan:** What we do is steer the discussion back to funding of the research ecosystem on minority language communities.

For one thing, there are 37 francophone research centres and one anglophone research centre. We focused our brief today on that.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** In one of your briefs—

**Mr. Patrick Donovan:** I can't speak to the funding for all universities.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** Okay.

**Mr. Patrick Donovan:** You would have to invite the university presidents if you want to discuss this issue.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** I understand, but you represent a research network on these communities.

In one of your briefs, you said that English-language universities received less public funding in the 1960s due to political tensions. However, that's simply not true.

It's a bit like what Dr. O'Donnell said earlier. There's a victimization stance claiming that anglophones are poorer and so on. However, you use indicators, among them the median, that include a large proportion of newcomers to Quebec. That brings down the average.

When indicators reflecting the history of the anglophone minority are used, you're still at the very top of the heap. English-language universities still have much more money coming in than French-language universities.

**Mr. Patrick Donovan:** I see what indicators you're using. You're referring to a study by Frédéric Lacroix that talks about university funding relative to the demographic weight of the minority. That study has been strongly criticized by researchers like Jean-Pierre Corbeil for making a false equivalency. At universities like McGill, 20% or 30% of students are from the anglophone minority and 70% are francophones.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** That's why they say that it's very instrumental in anglicizing francophones and newcomers to Quebec. It's the same thing for CEGEPs.

**Mr. Patrick Donovan:** There's no evidence that it serves to anglicize francophones.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** Yes, studies show that if people study in English at CEGEP or university, they are much more likely to work in English, and more of them will transfer to using English as their primary language.

You talk about weakened language vitality among anglophones. Language transfers to English are four to five times higher than the demographic weight of anglophones would warrant. Don't you think that's high enough?

**Mr. Patrick Donovan:** In the 1960s, 30% of anglophones were bilingual. Today, it's 70%, and for young people, it's nearly 80%. It's a community—

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** In Montreal, young francophones are more bilingual than young anglophones.

You're going to look for other data. You often talk about your affiliation with the QCGN, the Quebec Community Groups Network, which makes a lot of statements suggesting that defending French is racist. I would remind you that its former president, Ms. Jennings, compared Quebec's Bill 96 to measures the Russians took in Ukraine, among other things. Do you agree with that kind of statement?

**The Chair:** One moment, Mr. Beaulieu: Let's stick to the study. You're asking a witness to comment on hearsay.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** We'll go back to funding. That's okay, I have other questions.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Mr. Chair, please let my colleagues ask their questions about what they want to. I think that they're able to connect the questions to the study. Earlier in the meeting this morning, I noticed that other colleagues went beyond the subject of the study. I would like you to give my colleagues the freedom to speak as they wish.

**The Chair:** By the way, Mr. Beaulieu, I've stopped the clock. You're at four minutes and 54 seconds.

Mr. Godin, thank you for your comment. I know which question you were referring to. We were talking about the education continuum. That said, Mr. Beaulieu was asking a witness what he thinks about a study of federal funding for post-secondary institutions by referring to statements made by someone else.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** This witness constantly refers to the QCGN, Mr. Chair. So I have the right to ask about whether he agrees with the QCGN's philosophy. You may not like it, but...

**The Chair:** I come from New Brunswick, and that perspective on post-secondary education doesn't affect me at all.

Let's stick to the study and what the witnesses may say without asking them to comment on hearsay or to lend a...

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** This isn't hearsay. I'm asking them if they agree with a statement.

**The Chair:** Then go ahead. I may have misunderstood your question.

I'll start the clock again.

• (0950)

**Dr. Lorraine O'Donnell:** I would like to make a comment. We're very proud of the fact that we work with several community groups, including the QCGN, to understand our community's priorities. That said, we're independent of the QCGN and any other community group.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** I think my time is up.

**The Chair:** You still have 40 seconds.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** Perfect.

Mr. Donovan and Ms. O'Donnell, let's get back to university funding. The fact that you have much more funding in proportion to the demographic weight of anglophones means that, in Montreal, especially, many francophones and allophones attend an anglophone university. It's not true that this is a zero-sum game. Ultimately, the more funding and spaces available at anglophone universities, relative to francophone universities, the more people have no choice but to attend anglophone universities.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

The next questions will be asked by the NDP member.

Ms. Ashton, you have the floor for six minutes.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses.

Ms. Bouffard, as the president of Université de Saint-Boniface, you are well known and highly respected in Manitoba.

The purpose of the committee's study is to provide the federal government with clear recommendations. We know that the Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne, or ACUFC, talked about how francophone educational institutions need stable, predictable and adequate funding. The association referred to the \$80 million it had asked the federal government for in 2021. We have yet to see the federal government make such an investment, however.

Université de Saint-Boniface is part of the ACUFC, so can you talk about what that \$80 million would mean for your university? What would stable, predictable and adequate funding mean for you?

**Ms. Sophie Bouffard:** Thank you.

Yes, that funding is vital in order to truly be competitive and meet the needs of Franco-Manitobans and those who choose French immersion programs.

To give you an idea, I can tell you that, over the past six years, enrolment in the school system has gone up 1.4%. Compare that with 2.4% for the Franco-Manitoban school division, or FMSD, and 9.8% for French immersion enrolment. Nevertheless, the dropout rate between kindergarten and grade 12 is pretty high, and the same goes for the period between grade 12 and Université de Saint-Boniface.

We have to build that French education continuum, right up to Université de Saint-Boniface, which needs to be the target destination. We need to be able to work with the school boards on linguistic security issues, among other things. We have to work on a host of issues.

I know you've talked a lot about the teacher shortage. In Manitoba, Université de Saint-Boniface is responsible for training francophone teachers, and we've actually increased that capacity in the past few years. Three years ago, the university received a one-time federal investment of \$350,000 to support a cohort of up to 70 students, up from the 35 or 40 we had. Then the province stepped in with funding, and in the past two years, the number of students is up to 90. The university received recurrent funding from the province to achieve that target.

Federal funding is often leveraged, but there are other areas we need to focus on. This falls under the official languages banner, and that's why we need federal funding.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Thank you for bringing up the labour shortage. We are feeling it every day here, in Manitoba. I can attest to that as a parent whose children attend an FMSD school. I also see it in the immersion school system, which I'm a graduate of, by the way.

We're aware of the great work Université de Saint-Boniface is doing.

How important is it for the federal government to do something to address the labour shortage in education? We all know that education is a provincial responsibility, but we can't deny or ignore the significant labour shortage in francophone communities. Do you think the federal government needs to get involved? Do you think it should invest in post-secondary institutions that train teachers?

• (0955)

**Ms. Sophie Bouffard:** As I see it, the two levels of government need to work hand in hand to find solutions and build that capacity. For us, early childhood education is another important piece. Right now, the province and the federal government have come together to give us the funding we need to enhance our capacity. I think you're right. Talking to both levels of government and being at the table to provide the information is important.

We are losing a lot of our young people. To follow up on the statistics I gave you earlier, I can tell you that barely 8% of students who start their education in French, at the kindergarten level, stay in the French system until their post-secondary schooling is complete. That's a huge loss, representing millions of dollars. We did a little study, and when students leave the FMSD or immersion system between kindergarten and grade 12, it equates to \$97 million in lost value annually. Between grade 12 and Université de Saint-Boniface, we are losing roughly \$121 million a year. When you consider that the university has an annual budget of \$39 million, it doesn't take long to realize that a few extra million would help us take measures that make a real difference. We could ensure that continuity by training more teachers, educators and teaching assistants.

It's also important to look beyond education, because French-language health care services need support, and the list goes on.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Quickly, I'd like to talk about the role of international students at Université de Saint-Boniface. How vital is their role, and what message do you have for the federal government when it comes to international students?

**Ms. Sophie Bouffard:** We've really gone through the wringer these past few months.

International students make up 21% of our student body. We'd like to keep the percentage at that maximum level for a variety of reasons. International students are important. They contribute to the diversity and overall international experience of our students in Manitoba. They also play an important role because they support the community's immigration efforts. We know that many of our foreign graduates stay in the community after they finish school—nearly 80%.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Bouffard.

We are now beginning the second round.

Go ahead, Mrs. Kusie. You have five minutes.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being with us today.

I always have to start by pointing out any way in which I share a connection with the witnesses. I want you to know that my mother-in-law is from St. Boniface, her mother is from France and her fa-

ther is from Belgium. Their last name is Windels. All that to say that my husband has roots in St. Boniface. I always think it's important to show that many Canadians across the country have francophone roots. I'm from Alberta, and I do.

Ms. Bouffard, the francophone community has its own culture, and 3.7% of Manitoba's population speaks French as their mother tongue. Does Université de Saint-Boniface build connections with the community when developing its French programs? What is your university's relationship with the francophone community?

**Ms. Sophie Bouffard:** I would say it's very much driven by synergy. For example, Université de Saint-Boniface created a social work program in response to a request that came from the community. Our nursing program came about the same way. We work closely with the community.

We've even set up a round table, which, as far as I know, doesn't exist anywhere else. It has numerous representatives from across the education system: the FMSD, the university, immersion schools, the Fédération des parents de la francophonie manitobaine, the Conseil jeunesse provincial and the Société de la francophonie manitobaine. We sit down together and discuss our vision for education and our continuum.

I'll give you another example. The university worked with the federation and the Economic Development Council for Manitoba Bilingual Municipalities on ways to increase the availability of child care and train more early childhood educators. Working hand in hand like that has proven successful.

• (1000)

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Those are great examples.

I know we've already talked about international students, but I'd like to know more about where your other students come from. How many are from Manitoba's francophone community?

**Ms. Sophie Bouffard:** About 33% of our students, so a third, are from FMSD schools and another third come from immersion schools. In addition, 10% of our students are enrolled in a master's program and 21% are from other countries.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Very good. Thank you.

How many anglophones like me do you have? I'm talking about English speakers looking to better their French skills.

**Ms. Sophie Bouffard:** I would say that's the case for both groups, but since you're basically talking about students from immersion schools, it's about a third of our student body. However, the vast majority of the classes we offer through our continuing education division, including to public servants, revolve around French learning. As I said, we have more than 4,000 students in that division.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** That's great.

Are you confident that the program will continue to be successful and help Canadians in Manitoba improve their French proficiency?

**Ms. Sophie Bouffard:** Yes, absolutely. That's our mandate.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Yes, of course.

How much has the programming grown since it was created?

**Ms. Sophie Bouffard:** Which programming do you mean?

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** I'm talking about your programming.

**Ms. Sophie Bouffard:** Université de Saint-Boniface's roots go back to 1818, so we have a very long history. In the past few years, our programming has grown because we were allowed to increase our education capacity and the number of spots we had. We were able to enhance our capacity in both of our nursing programs, as well as in early childhood education. We created a teaching assistant program, as well. Now we have other things in the works. We shall see what the future holds.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** We've already talked a lot about provincial and federal funding, but what kind of funding do you need to expand those programs and accommodate a larger number of francophone students?

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Joël Godin):** You have 30 seconds left, Mrs. Kusie.

**Ms. Sophie Bouffard:** That's a big question.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Yes.

**Ms. Sophie Bouffard:** We still have work to do in order to identify all the programs, and we're conducting feasibility studies on that front. However, we also have to provide services and, above all, develop infrastructure to support student life on campus. We have excellent sports teams, but we need the infrastructure to support them, as well as all kinds of activities.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Thank you, Ms. Bouffard.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Joël Godin):** Thank you, Mrs. Kusie.

Before we go any further, I just want to let everyone know why I am running the meeting right now. The chair had to go to the House to try once again to table the committee's report on immigration. As first vice-chair, I am temporarily filling in for him.

Now we will go to my colleague, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Official Languages and committee member, Marc Serré for five minutes.

**Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

Thank you to both witnesses from the Quebec English-Speaking Communities Research Network.

[Translation]

During our first hour, Mr. Racine talked about the lack of transparency on the part of the provinces. You said you knew how much funding your institution had been allocated, obviously, but do you know how many French-language programs the Province of Manitoba funds across its total education budget?

**Ms. Sophie Bouffard:** It's probably more straightforward in Manitoba, since we are the only francophone institution. As for funding for French education, I would have to check provincial reports to see how much goes to the Bureau de l'éducation française.

**Mr. Marc Serré:** Earlier, you talked about recommendations that tied back to what we received from the round table. I bring it up because we're talking about scholarships, infrastructure, a wider availability of French programs and the \$80 million in recurrent funding—which we are working to secure with the finance department.

Do you have specific recommendations on how that money should be spent, aside from helping to address the teacher shortage? You need everything, but where should the investment go? Should it go towards infrastructure or programming? What issues do you have in mind, and what kind of partnership do you have with the province?

**Ms. Sophie Bouffard:** It's really interconnected, isn't it? If we want to add more programs, we need the appropriate infrastructure so we can accommodate a larger student body. We have to find a way to balance all that. We also need to make sure we have the capacity to serve that population. Linguistic insecurity is top of mind for us, but we should be offering all kinds of other supports. I would say that the big piece really involves the programming.

• (1005)

**Mr. Marc Serré:** All right. Thank you.

[English]

Thank you, Ms. O'Donnell, for your testimony today. You mentioned that you represent 80 researchers, so you don't necessarily focus on Concordia or universities: You focus on the 80 researchers.

Are they all getting their funding from NSERC, from the tri-agency? Where is the money coming from?

**Mr. Patrick Donovan:** We're a network of researchers, so I can't speak to where different researchers are getting their funding. Some of them are university-based. Some of them are in Japan. Some are in universities in the Netherlands. It's a network.

We fund occasional projects with researchers, depending on the money we get, but most of them get funding through their own institutions, and some of them are retired or independent researchers who don't get any funding.

[Translation]

**Mr. Marc Serré:** Mr. Donovan, you said a few things earlier in response to a question from our colleague, Mr. Beaulieu. I would like to understand your comments better.

You gave the example of McGill University. A number of our cabinet members speak excellent French and studied at McGill University. We have English-speaking members of Parliament who speak French very well, such as Ms. Koutrakis. She did her CEGEP and finance courses in English.

You spoke of data and statistics on bilingualism. Can you elaborate on this?

Moreover, you seem to have a different view of the situation. People say that English speakers in Montreal may have more advantages, but that places off the island of Montreal, such as Gaspésie, seem to have a complete lack of services in English. What can the federal government do to help you?

**Mr. Patrick Donovan:** Regarding your first question, Mr. Beaulieu spoke at length about funding in relation to the weight of the minority. I believe that he was referring to a study by Frédéric Lacroix, which shows that English-language universities receive more funding in relation to the weight of the minority. My counter-argument is that McGill University doesn't just serve the minority. Over 70% of its students aren't English-speaking Quebecers.

To answer your second question, the availability of services varies greatly across the province. Even in Montreal, there are poorer English-speaking neighbourhoods, especially in Verdun, and there are wealthier neighbourhoods. There's a great deal of socio-economic variety.

There are many realities in Quebec. The population is declining significantly on the Basse-Côte-Nord, for example. All these cases warrant further study and attention, because we're all Quebecers. It's time to think about how to deal with this.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Joël Godin):** Thank you, Mr. Donovan.

Thank you, Mr. Serré.

I'll now give the floor to the committee's second vice-chair, Mario Beaulieu, from the Bloc Québécois.

Mr. Beaulieu, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. O'Donnell and Mr. Donovan, I would like to come back to the Frédéric Lacroix study that we talked about earlier. You questioned the figures. However, suppose it's true that 35% to 40% of federal funding in Quebec goes to English-language universities. Do you consider this fair?

**Dr. Lorraine O'Donnell:** Mr. Beaulieu, I gather that you're talking about research funding. You aren't talking about funding for infrastructure or program spending.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** For infrastructure, it would be the same, if not higher, according to your own figures.

Suppose that 35% to 40% of federal research funding for Quebec universities goes to English-language universities, depending on the year. Do you consider this fair?

**Dr. Lorraine O'Donnell:** I'm a researcher, not a politician. I find it hard to say whether this is fair. I think that this is about individual researchers applying for funding. So, it's—

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** I'll ask you another question that might be easier.

The federal government's official languages funding for Quebec supports English at a rate of 94%. Is this fair?

• (1010)

**Dr. Lorraine O'Donnell:** Are you talking about funding for official language minority communities in Quebec?

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** Yes.

**Dr. Lorraine O'Donnell:** The funding is there to support English-speaking communities. It's only natural that this funding supports English. It supports a number of projects—

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** English speakers are numerically a minority in Quebec. However, unlike the French-speaking minority communities outside Quebec, they're part of the English-Canadian majority. They're surrounded by 350 million English speakers, if you count the United States. It makes no sense for English Canada to come tell Quebec that it will support English because it's a minority in Quebec.

**Dr. Lorraine O'Donnell:** For English-speaking Quebecers, the fragility doesn't lie in language, but in community vitality. Our communities need support. There are issues, as I said, including poverty.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** In terms of community vitality, almost everywhere in Quebec, where a certain proportion of the population speaks English, language transfers favour English. When you compare this to French speakers outside Quebec, there isn't any point of comparison.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Joël Godin):** Mr. Beaulieu, your comment is highly relevant. Unfortunately, Ms. O'Donnell won't be able to respond, because your time is up.

Our final speaker is Ms. Ashton from northern Manitoba. She represents the New Democratic Party.

Ms. Ashton, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Thank you.

Ms. Bouffard, my question concerns the teacher training program that you spoke about. Given your current work, how would you recommend that the government help increase the number of French-speaking teachers?

**Ms. Sophie Bouffard:** We already have plans in place for a third phase of education capacity expansion so that the Université de Saint-Boniface can accept more education students.

To do this, we built a model by working with school divisions, not just the Franco-Manitoban School Division, but school divisions that provide French immersion programs throughout Manitoba, including in the north. We know that this area faces challenges. We looked at how to identify the young people currently in school who will become the teachers of the future. We thought about how we could train them, work with them now to address language insecurity, provide workshops and ultimately accept them at the Université de Saint-Boniface for their first bachelor's degree and then their bachelor's degree in education.

The goal is really to identify them and support them from a young age. We already have a project ready to submit, and we're waiting for funding. To bring the project to fruition, we must also increase the recruitment capacity of the Université de Saint-Boniface.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Thank you. We hope that you'll receive federal and provincial government support.

We know that our education system is closely tied to the Université de Saint-Boniface. This isn't the issue. The issue is the lack of long-term support. We must start by acknowledging the labour shortage crisis. The next generations will pay the price if we don't try to find a solution.

I would like to address the international students issue. In your opinion, should Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada and the federal government recognize and accommodate the needs of educational institutions such as the Université de Saint-Boniface when it comes to recruiting international students?

**Ms. Sophie Bouffard:** It's a file—

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Joël Godin):** Ms. Ashton, that's a good question. Unfortunately, your time is up. Your highly relevant question ties in with the one that I asked earlier.

Ms. Bouffard, president of the Université de Saint-Boniface, if you can provide a written response to my colleague's excellent question, I invite you to do so. Thank you.

I also want to thank Lorraine O'Donnell and Patrick Donovan from the Quebec English-Speaking Communities Research Network.

I would like to thank all three of you for making yourselves available and for attending this morning's meeting. If you would like to bring something to the attention of the committee members, or to provide additional information, please send it in writing to the clerk. This will make us even more effective and help us prepare a good report on our study.

Committee members, since you'll be in your constituencies next week, I would like to wish you a pleasant vacation from Ottawa. People think that when we're away from Ottawa, we aren't working. However, it's quite the opposite.

We'll be meeting again on Monday, April 29, for committee business.

Is it the will of the committee to adjourn the meeting?

**Voices:** Agreed.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Joël Godin):** Thank you.

The meeting is adjourned.

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