

Report of the Advisory Committee on Francophone Affairs to the Government of Saskatchewan



October 2022

Infrastructure

Letter of Transmittal

Honourable Laura Ross
Minister, Parks, Culture and Sport, responsible for Francophone Affairs

I am pleased to submit this report for your review, following the March 8, 2022 meeting of the Advisory Committee on Francophone Affairs.

On this occasion, we met with representatives from the ministries of Education, SaskBuilds and Procurement, and Parks, Culture and Sport, as well as with representatives of Francophone community organizations to discuss school and community infrastructure in Saskatchewan.

On behalf of the Advisory Committee, I am pleased to present this report. The recommendations are intended to guide the government in the improvement and implementation of actions to meet the needs for school and community infrastructure in the Fransaskois community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'MDubé', is centered below the text 'Sincerely,'.

Michel Dubé
Chair, Advisory Committee on Francophone Affairs
October 2022

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Introduction

Investing in school and community infrastructure is essential to the vitality of Francophone minority communities. Good schools with adequate premises attract parents and encourage them to enrol their children. At the same time, the presence of adapted community centres allows Francophones to flourish, to continue living in French and to sustain their community.

Provincial government infrastructure programs fall under different ministries, and currently there are no specific provincial programs for Francophone infrastructure. The main infrastructure program for Francophones is in the field of education, where the provincial government has a constitutional obligation to invest in the Francophone education system specifically. French-language education in Saskatchewan, however, continues to face many challenges with respect to school infrastructure, which has a negative impact on the growth of the school population and in turn, undermines the vitality of the community.

Besides the challenges in education, the community also faces many infrastructure challenges. Indeed, in addition to the lack of infrastructure programs specific to Francophones, the Fransaskois community and Fransaskois organizations are not directly informed of the provincial programs from which they could benefit.

In preparing this report and in order to make recommendations, the Advisory Committee met with many community and educational stakeholders, as well as with officials from the ministries of Education, SaskBuilds and the fields of procurement, and Parks, Culture and Sport. The Advisory Committee is grateful for their participation in this meeting and for their contributions.

Recommendations

1. (a) That the Ministry of Government Relations undertake the promotion of existing infrastructure programs in French to enable the Fransaskois community and Fransaskois organizations to apply to them.
(b) That the Government of Saskatchewan ensure that infrastructure programs adhere to the French-language Services Policy.
2. That the Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport commit to reintroducing the former Francophone Community Infrastructure Fund and add enhancements to better meet the many infrastructure needs of the Fransaskois community.
3. That the Ministry of Education accelerate the delivery of the new school construction projects promised in the agreement-in-principle signed in March 2019 with the Conseil scolaire fransaskois, to ensure these schools are operational as soon as possible.

4. That the Ministry of Education develop a new funding formula for the renovation of school infrastructure, taking into account the specific needs of the Conseil des écoles francsaskoises.

Advisory Committee Mandate

In 2003, the Government of Saskatchewan adopted its French-language Services Policy. With this policy, the Government of Saskatchewan committed to “enhancing the services offered to Saskatchewan’s Francophone community in support of the development and vitality of this community.”¹

The policy is organized according to three areas:

1. Communication;
2. Development and delivery of services; and
3. Consultation.

The mandate of the Advisory Committee on Francophone Affairs is to advise the Minister of Parks, Culture and Sport, responsible for Francophone Affairs, through the review and analysis of programs and policies to guide the implementation of Saskatchewan’s French-language Services Policy.

Community Infrastructure Programs

During the meeting with government officials, the Advisory Committee learned about provincially-managed infrastructure programs of which they had not been previously aware. The Advisory Committee had the sense that these programs were also not known to Fransaskois organizations and communities. The Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program (ICIP) particularly caught the attention of Advisory Committee members. This program is implemented through bilateral agreements between provinces and territories and the federal government, and includes a community, cultural and recreational component that may be of interest to Francophone not-for-profit organizations seeking funding for larger infrastructure projects.

The Advisory Committee noted that provincially managed infrastructure programs are not being promoted to the Fransaskois community as well as they could be. All documents, eligibility requirements and funding application submission procedures are in English. The Advisory Committee asked the ministries responsible for infrastructure programs, particularly the ICIP, to identify strategies to make those programs known to the Fransaskois community. However, it should be noted that under ICIP, the funding application process is competitive; applicants are encouraged to partner with other applicants on a project, and eligible projects are not necessarily always approved due to available funding.

According to the Government of Saskatchewan’s French-language Services Policy, adopted in 2003, “The [provincial government] is committed to enhancing the services

¹[Government of Saskatchewan French-language Services Policy](#)

offered to Saskatchewan's Francophone community in support of the development and vitality of this community. "² Unfortunately, the development and vitality of a community cannot be assured without adequate infrastructure.

Recommendation 1

- (a) That the Ministry of Government Relations undertake the promotion of existing infrastructure programs in French to enable the Fransaskois community and Fransaskois organizations to apply to them.
- (b) That the Government of Saskatchewan ensure that infrastructure programs adhere to the French-Language Services Policy.

Program for Francophone Infrastructure

"The purpose of [the province's growth plan] is to build a better quality of life for Saskatchewan people – to build strong communities and strong families [...]".³ The Fransaskois community needs support for infrastructure in order to help its culture, language and identity flourish and, therefore, ensure its own sustainability and a good quality of life.

Most Fransaskois organizations operate in old buildings that require either renovations or regular maintenance. Adaptations are necessary to provide modern-day services not possible within the existing building but that other organizations can provide. The growth in student enrolment in Fransaskois schools also has a negative impact on the functioning of these organizations, which are often housed under the same roof as schools. Indeed, they are forced to give up their space to schools and end up with a lack of space for their offices and operations.

Many community-based projects are small and do not meet the requirements of existing infrastructure programs such as ICIP, which requires a project cost of at least \$100,000. Currently, there are no provincial programs specific to small infrastructure projects that could meet some of the needs of the Fransaskois community. Additionally, community centres that are not located in the same buildings as Fransaskois schools face difficulties in funding their infrastructure projects. Funding is available for community spaces within schools as special projects under the Canada-Saskatchewan education agreement. By way of example, this is the case for the current project to renovate the Bistro du Carrefour des Plaines, located in the same building as the École Monseigneur de Laval, in Regina. The actions by the government are encouraging, but they do not apply to all Fransaskois community centres. The Advisory Committee invites the government to implement a funding option to address these challenges with respect to funding small Francophone community projects.

In the 2011-2012 provincial budget, the Government of Saskatchewan had committed for the first time to continuously support infrastructure projects that boost the vitality of the

² [Government of Saskatchewan French-language Services Policy](#)

³ Saskatchewan's Growth Plan

Francophone community through the annual Francophone Community Infrastructure Fund of \$100,000. This funding was eliminated in 2015-2016, which has worsened the state of community infrastructure over the years. This fund, however small, was working well and providing relief for some small community infrastructure projects. Organizations were well organized in its use and allocation. During this period, the fund allowed for an investment of \$400,000 in Fransaskois community infrastructure and led to an additional \$459,000 in community and federal investments.

The Advisory Committee is convinced that a similar fund, with a larger amount, would help alleviate the infrastructure problems experienced by the Fransaskois community. In addition to extra federal investments, the creation of a Francophone Small Projects Fund would be a concrete step taken by the provincial government to comply with its French-language Services Policy.

Recommendation 2

That the Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport commit to reintroducing the former Francophone Community Infrastructure Fund and add enhancements to better meet the many infrastructure needs of the Fransaskois community.

School Infrastructure

The Conseil des écoles fransaskoises (CEF) is the only Francophone school board in Saskatchewan. According to data from September 30, 2021, the CEF has 15 elementary and secondary schools across the province, with a total enrolment of 1,812 students from kindergarten to grade 12. Under section 23 of *The Constitution Act, 1982*, the Ministry of Education funds the CEF and must ensure adequate school infrastructure for the Fransaskois school system. However, the CEF and the Fransaskois community must go to great lengths to assert their rights under this section, as these rights are not always respected.

The Advisory Committee members were informed during the meeting with community representatives that there are critical infrastructure needs in CEF schools owing to renovations or lack of space.

In order to respond to requests from the CEF and the Fransaskois community, on March 19, 2019, the Conseil scolaire fransaskois and the Ministry of Education signed an agreement-in-principle for projects to build three new schools by 2025 in the Regina, Saskatoon and Prince Albert school regions. On June 23, 2020, the Government of Saskatchewan announced funding to build the school in Regina. Since then, no further announcements have been made regarding either the Saskatoon or Prince Albert school.

In the meantime, the lack of adequate school infrastructure and, especially, the lack of space, continue to have an impact on the growth in the number of enrolled students. Indeed, the number of students in the CEF schools in Regina increased during the 2021-

2022 school year, while in Saskatoon and Prince Albert, where new schools have not yet been announced, the number of students in those schools has either declined or remained the same. This has a negative effect on the development of high school programming and, in turn, impacts the Francophone education continuum and the overall vitality of the Fransaskois community.

The Advisory Committee was disappointed to learn that the 2025 deadline specified in the agreement-in-principle for the construction of the three schools refers to announcements and not the start of the actual construction. With the negative impacts already experienced, the delay in announcing the budget for the construction of the other two schools is only further exacerbating the situation. The longer the announcements are delayed, the longer the building of the schools is delayed; as such, there will be other delays before they are operational. While the agreement goes to 2025, the Advisory Committee felt it was necessary that the government and the Ministry of Education make a strong commitment to accelerate the development of these promised schools as soon as possible.

Recommendation 3

That the Ministry of Education accelerate the delivery of the new school construction projects promised in the agreement-in-principle signed in March 2019 with the Conseil scolaire fransaskois, to ensure these schools are operational as soon as possible.

Renovation of Existing Infrastructure

Like all other school boards, the CEF receives regular funding from the Ministry of Education for infrastructure renovations. However, the amount of funding is insufficient and does not allow the CEF to meet the many needs, given its unique nature. The CEF, operating for the purposes of minority communities, has a triple mandate, that is, education, culture and community, placing it in a unique position compared to other school boards in the province. Serving minority communities, and in some areas with limited student populations, the majority of Fransaskois schools are located in old buildings, which further exposes them to many challenges in terms of renovation and maintenance.

The CEF's uniqueness allows it to receive federal funding for renovations. However, infrastructure projects are considered special projects, and the amounts to be received for these are not known far enough in advance to allow for long-term renovation planning. The Advisory Committee encourages the Ministry of Education to develop a new funding formula for renovations, taking into account the specific nature of the CEF, and to facilitate the provision of federal funding under federal-provincial education agreements.

Recommendation 4

That the Ministry of Education develop a new funding formula for the renovation of the

school infrastructure, taking into account the specific needs of the Conseil des écoles fransaskoises.

Conclusion

The Advisory Committee acknowledges the participation of government representatives at the meeting. The Advisory Committee is also encouraged by the 2019 agreement-in-principle to build three schools to improve Francophone school infrastructure. However, delays in announcing and building of the three promised schools were of concern to the Advisory Committee, given the many challenges and negative impacts that CEF schools face. In addition, the Fransaskois community and Fransaskois organizations face multiple infrastructure challenges. Support from the provincial government is an absolute necessity in ensuring their vitality.

List of Members

At the March 8, 2022 Advisory Committee meeting, the members were as follows:

Michel Dubé (Chair), Prince Albert

Michel Dubé was born in Duck Lake. He has been involved with the Francophone community in Saskatchewan for a long time, notably in community development and education. He was a member of the board of the Assemblée communautaire fransaskoise between 1999 and 2010, first as the community representative from the Prince Albert district and then as president between 2006 and 2010. Mr. Dubé has been a journalist, consultant and entrepreneur. He has owned several businesses including a produce farm and a fishing lodge. He is now owner of a small store featuring local goods and operates a bison farm north of Prince Albert.

Janice Murphy, Regina

Living in Saskatchewan for almost 20 years, Janice first worked at Collège Mathieu, offering, among other things, computer training for Francophone women in the province. She has volunteered with various Fransaskois associations, including the Fédération provinciale des Fransaskoises (FPF), the Association communautaire fransaskoise de Gravelbourg (ACFG), and the Association canadienne-française de Regina. She founded a family with her spouse from the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, enabling her to experience French education from daycare to Grade 12, and to better understand the challenges and successes of French-speaking newcomers. She currently works as a senior human resources partner with the Crown Corporation, Farm Credit Canada (FCC).

Élizabeth Perreault, Bellevue

Élizabeth Perreault and her husband own and operate a farm near Bellevue. Ms. Perreault has volunteered within many organizations in her community, including the local Francophone association and the Francophone school in her area. She has represented the St-Isidore school district (Bellevue) on the Conseil scolaire fransaskois since 2008.

Roger Gauthier, Saskatoon

Living in Saskatchewan for the past 40 years, Mr. Gauthier has been actively involved in the Fransaskois community both as a professional and as a volunteer at the local, provincial and national levels in multiple sectors: communications, economics, community development, cultural and artistic development, education, and involvement with parent and early childhood issues. Over the past seven years, his commitment has focused more specifically on improving access to health services in French through his role with the Réseau Santé en français.

Hélène Grimard, Saskatoon

Born and raised Fransaskoise, Hélène Grimard has not only maintained her first language, but has also helped it flourish by directing her career and volunteer work towards learning at all levels. Her career has focused mainly on French immersion

and core French education, as well as education in Fransaskois schools, as she has taken on a wide variety of roles: member of the support staff, teacher, member of the school administration, and manager. She has been teaching provincial and federal public servants and has also taught courses for the Alliance française. As a volunteer, she has collaborated with Canadian Parents for French to promote their Concours d'art oratoire (a public speaking competition) and organized the competition of the Saskatoon Catholic School Board's French immersion schools. She has sat on the executive board of the Saskatchewan Association of Teachers of French (SATF) and on the executive board of the Fédération des Francophones de Saskatoon. As well, she sat on the Conseil scolaire fransaskois as a representative of the Saskatoon region between 2017 and 2020. She is currently an administrator of the Association des parents fransaskois and a member of the University of Saskatchewan Senate, mandated by the Assemblée communautaire fransaskoise to ensure the Francophone community's voice is heard.

Jolanta Bird, Saskatoon

Jolanta Bird is a student, entrepreneur and active community member. As an Aboriginal woman, she is keen to learn about First Nations traditions, notably through her involvement with the Gordon Tootosis Nikaniwin Theatre Company. She graduated from École Valois in Prince Albert where she was president of the student council. She is active in the Francophone community as vice-president of the Association jeunesse fransaskoise (Fransaskois youth association). As a board member of the youth association, she participated in a conference marking the 50th anniversary of the *Official Languages Act*. She currently studies Business at the University of Saskatchewan and plans to pursue her studies in Law.

Denis Simard, Regina

Denis Simard has been involved in the Canadian Francophonie for many years. A graduate of College Mathieu in Gravelbourg, Denis was Executive Director of the Association jeunesse fransaskoise and of the Assemblée communautaire fransaskoise (ACF). An engaged Fransaskois citizen, he first became involved with the Conseil jeunesse francophone de la Colombie-Britannique, the Conseil culturel fransaskois, and the Centre culturel Maillard. He was elected president of the ACF in 2018.

Alpha Barry, Regina

Alpha Barry was born in Senegal, a country famed for its hospitality ("teranga" in Wolof), and has lived in Saskatchewan since 2005. A proud Francophone, husband, and father of three young children, he has been a board member of the Conseil scolaire fransaskois since November 2014, and has been its Chair since 2017. He is also a member of the University of Saskatchewan's Senate, mandated by the Saskatchewan School Boards Association to speak on behalf of the school community, from kindergarten to Grade 12. Mr. Barry holds a degree in Business Administration and is a member of Chartered Managers Canada (CIM). He is part of the administrative team at the University of Regina, as the operations manager and project coordinator for French-language health training for La Cité universitaire francophone of Regina.