

2019 Federal Budget: Ottawa ready to open the purse strings to facilitate the signing of the education Protocol

Ottawa, March 19, 2019 — The Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones (FNCSF) is delighted with a measure aimed at enhancing support for minority-language education, as unveiled today in the federal budget.

In this budget, the federal government announced it has set aside additional funds to enhance its support for minority-language education, as it works with provinces and territories to finalize the next Protocol.

Ottawa specified however that “any additional funding will be conditional upon the conclusion of a new Protocol, or subject to new bilateral agreements, which would include commitments by the provinces and territories regarding accountability with respect to the use of federal investments, and regular consultations with stakeholders, including school boards, in the design of related action plans.”

According to FNCSF President Mario Pelletier, this measure should encourage the provinces and territories to reach an agreement with the federal government on a new education Protocol. He explains: “The group of stakeholders was unable to agree on a new Protocol by the March 31, 2019 deadline. Ottawa decided to postpone the deadline by one year due to the intense negotiations surrounding the renewal of the education Protocol. The federal government’s proposal to provide additional education funds should address the concerns of provinces and territories that were worried about the near absence of increases to finance supplementary first-language education costs in the Action Plan for Official Languages.”

The federal budget does not specify the amount of this additional funding, but the FNCSF hopes it will be sufficient to rally the provinces and territories around a new education Protocol.

Mr. Pelletier adds that the conditions attached to the granting of the additional funding are consistent with the principles of accountability and consultation found in the strategic education agreement that Mélanie Joly, minister responsible for the Francophonie, signed in July 2017 with the FNCSF and two of its partners, the Federation of Francophone and Acadian Communities of Canada and the Commission nationale des parents francophones.

The FNCSF also views positively the government’s decision to invest in universal access to high-speed Internet. The federal government expects that by 2030, all homes and small businesses in the country will have access to high-speed Internet service.

Access to high-speed Internet is essential for all of the 700 elementary and secondary schools in our education network, many of which are located in remote areas. Our schools

operate the digital age and must be able to count on a fast and reliable Internet network both for teaching students and for online courses.

However, the FNCSF would have liked the initiative aimed at promoting the benefits of a Canadian education to include French-language minority schools. This new measure is intended to promote Canadian educational institutions as high-calibre locations in order to attract foreign students.

“More and more French school boards welcome foreign students who choose to pursue their high school education in Canada and who often decide to remain in the country to complete their post-secondary studies in French. French-language schools must be made better known, which in turn, ought to contribute to attracting quality Francophone immigrants who can be integrated easily,” stated Mario Pelletier.

The Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones represents the 28 French school boards in minority settings in Canada. These deliver French-language education to 165,000 students attending some 700 schools.

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