

Comparution devant le Comité permanent des Langues officielles sur l'enjeu du
recensement

FNCSF -Mars 2020

Hello. My name is Denis M. Chartrand.

I'm the third vice president of the National Federation of French-Language School Boards.

Our federation represents more than 265 school trustees servicing the 28 French-language school boards operating in minority settings in Canada.

These French-language school boards are located in 9 provinces and 3 territories... that is everywhere in Canada excepted in the province of Quebec.

They are servicing more than 170 000 students attending more than 700 elementary and secondary schools.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank committee members for giving our federation the opportunity to explain why it's so crucial for the vitality and sustainability of

Francophone and Acadian communities to be able to collect precise and complete data through an enhanced short-Census form Questionnaire.

I'm joined today by our executive director, Mrs Valérie Morand. We've submitted to committee members an 18 pages brief which details our position as it regards to the urgency to add questions to the short-census form in order to better enumerate rights holders.

Since 2017, the Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones has been urging Statistics Canada to modify the short-form Canadian Census Questionnaire in order to better quantify the number of eligible children in French-language minority schools.

The government must require that Statistics Canada add questions to the short-form census questionnaire – not only to the long questionnaire. This is the only way to quantify all rights holders pursuant to section 23 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

Currently, three categories of Canadians have the right to have their children educated in French pursuant to Section 23:

- 1) parents whose first language is French;
- 2) parents who have received the major part of their primary school instruction in French; and
- 3) parents of whom any child has received or is receiving instruction in French.

However, Statistics Canada persists in counting only one of the three categories of children. As a result, the census underestimates the number of rights holders.

The data will only be useful for French-language school boards and for Ministries of Education if they determine rather than estimate the actual number of children and which attendance boundary they live in.

The short-form Census Questionnaire is the only way to enumerate all rights holders, as it is the only way to determine the numbers within a specific geographic sector.

Conversely, the long questionnaire estimates the numbers and guesses at the geographic sector.

Il est impossible de démontrer que « le nombre justifie » une école à l'aide d'un échantillon d'ayants droit ; cela ne se réalise qu'à l'aide de données véritables.

It is impossible to demonstrate that “the numbers justify” a school based on a sample of rights holders: this can only be accomplished with real data.

Provincial and territorial governments and French school boards must know where to offer education services and where to invest in school infrastructures in order to fulfill their obligations pursuant to section 23 of the *Charter* and protect the linguistic minority and the minority language.

At this time, the data available on the number of children likely to be enrolled in French-language minority schools underestimate the needs as regards French-language education in Canadian provinces and territories.

Such shortcomings in the current census have adverse effects on the vitality of French-language communities throughout the country where French is the language of the official language minority.

The profile of rights holders has changed and must be reflected in the census

The Francophonie has changed and an increasing number of adults speak more than one language. French is often not the mother tongue of recently immigrated Francophones. However, since they and their children were educated in French, they fall under paragraph 23(1) (b) of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. This new reality must be reflected in the short-form Census Questionnaire's data collection.

Using only French as the mother tongue does not provide an accurate picture of Canada's Francophone population in minority settings, thereby excluding an increasingly significant number of rights holders. This creates headaches for school administrators who struggle to meet the growing demand for French first-language education.

Schools overflowing!

The lack of evidence during new school infrastructure planning very often results in schools that are too small to meet the demand. The addition of portables is the most visible consequence of this lack of evidence. Only just built, schools must install portables to respond to an underestimated demand.

Recommendations

Since 2017, the Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones has taken some forty steps to make the federal government aware of the importance of modifying the short-form Census Questionnaire to better enumerate rights holders.

Consequently, the following is the FNCSF's key recommendations:

- 1- In the short term that additional questions be added to the short-form Census Questionnaire to better enumerate Rights holders**
- 2- Eventually that amendments to the Official Languages Act expressly require Statistics Canada to enumerate rights holders under Section 23 of the Charter**

Complete and reliable data on children eligible to attend French-language schools are essential for French-language school boards in order to battle assimilation.

These data will allow school boards to better plan their infrastructure needs and to better advocate for capital project priorities before provincial and territorial ministries of education.

However, census data provide a very incomplete picture of rights holders under Section 23 of the Charter. In failing to provide the data necessary to correctly demonstrate that the number so warrants, the census hinders the implementation of Section 23 of the Charter. In effect, the census threatens the future of Francophone and Acadian communities. It constitutes a “negative measure” (not a “positive” one) by Statistics Canada, which must cease as early as the next Census (in 2021).

Conclusion

Simply put, the short-form Census Questionnaire must be modified by the addition of questions to better enumerate rights holders because the vitality and sustainability of Francophone and Acadian communities in minority settings in Canada are at stake.

Time is of the essence. The modification of the short-form Census Questionnaire must happen now, in time for the next census in 2021, in order for the federal government to meet its obligations pertaining to linguistic duality.

At this time, the data available on the number of children likely to be enrolled in French-language minority schools underestimate the needs as regards French-language education in Canadian provinces and territories.

The sociodemographic reality of minority communities is simple and well-known: 1) fewer and fewer children eligible to attend French-language schools have French as their only first language learned, and more and more of them learn French at school (and not in the home before they start school). Thus, the number and proportion of parents who meet the criteria of paragraph 23(1)a) of the Charter (the only category enumerated by the census) is falling significantly, while the number and proportion of parents who meet the criteria of paragraph 23(1)b) and subsection 23(2) is rising very rapidly (but these categories are not enumerated by the census).

Using only French as the mother tongue does not provide an accurate picture of Canada's Francophone population in minority settings, thereby excluding an increasingly significant number of rights holders. This creates headaches for school administrators who struggle to meet the growing demand for French first-language education.

There is no doubt that education plays a fundamental role in the vitality of Francophone communities. This Committee has openly acknowledged this since the publication of its report on education in 2005. The consequence of the systematic and intentional undercounting of children who have a parent with rights under Section 23 of the Charter threatens the survival of Francophone communities outside Quebec. It makes it very difficult – and in some cases impossible – for French language school boards to justify their applications to provincial or territorial authorities for additional schools, because they do not have the evidence that the “numbers warrant” them!

The short-form Census Questionnaire, which is sent out to 100% of the population, is the only format possible for enumerating rights holders properly. The numerical criterion set out in Section 23 of the Charter (“where the number warrants”) depends on the enumeration of all rights holders.

I’d like to thank you for your attention. I will answer any questions you may have.