



Child Care Services that Consider the Needs of Alberta's Francophonie

Brief by the Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta (ACFA) and the Fédération des parents francophones de l'Alberta (FPFA) submitted to Alberta's Ministry of Affordability and Public Services and Ministry of Children's Services in the context of the *Canada-Alberta Early Learning and Child Care Agreement* and the *French Policy*

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Summary of the ACFA and FPFA's recommendations to address the needs of Alberta's Francophonie in the implementation of the *Canada-Alberta Early Learning and Child Care Agreement* and the *French Policy*

Affordability

1. **Implement an additional financial incentive for families enrolled in Francophone child care.**

Accessibility

2. **Use the results of the desert study commissioned by the Fédération des parents francophones de l'Alberta (FPFA) and the Conseil de développement économique de l'Alberta (CDÉA) to provide equitable funding for creating new Francophone child care spaces (Early Learning and Child Care).**
3. **Provide operational funding for Francophone rural child care and family dayhome services to maintain their service and retain staff.**
4. **Fund and recognize the operating and maintenance costs of early childhood spaces in Francophone schools.**

Inclusion

5. **Create a financial incentive to support the sharing of administrative services in child care services by and for Francophones.**
6. **Support the creation of a team of early childhood experts to address the special needs of Francophone children with vulnerabilities (e.g. disabilities, newcomers, francization, speech therapy, etc.).**
7. **Implement a financial incentive to encourage the development of Francophone language and cultures within spaces by and for Francophones, as well as the acquisition of educational resources, awareness workshops, and resources for families in French.**

Quality

8. **Provide an additional salary top-up for staff working in Francophone child care in Alberta.**
9. **Provide a service by and for Francophones to support Francophone educators' professional developmental needs, which would have a greater impact on recruiting and retaining a Francophone workforce.**

Introduction

[1] The Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta ("ACFA") and the Fédération des parents francophones de l'Alberta ("FPFA") are submitting a brief to Alberta's Ministry of Affordability and Public Services and Ministry of Children's Services as part of the *Canada-Alberta Early Learning and Child Care Agreement* and to implement the Government of Alberta's *French Policy*. The ACFA and FPFA wish to bring considerations specific to Alberta's Francophonie to the attention of the ministries.

[2] Founded in 1926, the ACFA is the spokes organization for Alberta's Francophonie. The ACFA rallies key stakeholders to protect the accomplishments and enhance the vitality of Alberta's Francophonie, and improve its members' rights. Its mandate is to represent Alberta's French-speaking population; promote their physical, intellectual, economic, cultural, and social well-being; and encourage, facilitate, and promote French-language learning and Alberta's Francophonie at large. In addition, the ACFA fosters the inclusion of French speakers, whether they have French as their mother tongue or as a learned language, of all origins within a plural francophone space.

[3] Founded in 1986, the FPFA is the organization that represents the early childhood sector within Alberta's Francophonie. Among other things, the FPFA promotes the active participation of parents in their children's education at home, in educational institutions, and in communities within Alberta's Francophonie. The FPFA brings together all of Alberta's Francophone school councils, all preschool parent committees (preschools, daycares, playgroups) and regional parent committees.

[4] In this brief, the ACFA and FPFA present the following:

- a) The **status of French in Alberta** by presenting a demographic portrait of Alberta's Francophonie and two legislative texts that support the offer of services in French and the recognition of the Francophonie in the province;
- b) **Issues to consider** based on existing literature to understand the specific needs of members of Alberta's Francophonie;
- c) **Recommendations** to ensure that child care services that meet the real needs of members of Alberta's Francophonie are available and that they are of comparable quality to those available in English.

Status of French in Alberta

Demographic Profile

[5] Alberta's Francophonie is well-established in the province due to its history, demographics, and institutions.

[6] The first Francophone presence in Alberta dates back to the 18th century, well over 200 years ago. French was the first European language spoken in the territory that became Alberta. As early as the 19th century, several Métis communities, Franco-Catholic missions, and Francophone villages were established. Four of these villages became officially bilingual: Beaumont, Legal, Falher, and Plamondon.¹

¹ Government of Alberta. "Francophone heritage in Alberta." <https://www.alberta.ca/francophone-heritage.aspx>

[7] Today, Alberta has the largest population with French as its first official language spoken and living in a minority setting in Canada after Ontario and New Brunswick.²

[8] Approximately 79,965 (1.88%) Albertans report French as their first official language spoken, 88,005 (2.06%) report French as their mother tongue, and 261,435 (6.13%) report knowledge of French.³

[9] In addition, Alberta has the second largest population of children eligible for minority language education in the country (excluding Quebec). There are 67,140 children with at least one parent who is a right-holder⁴. Section 23 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* ("Charter") gives children the right to be educated in the minority official language; in Alberta this is French.

[10] French ranks 4th among mother tongues in Alberta, after English which ranks 1st (3,083,840), Tagalog 2nd (108,395), and Punjabi 3rd (91,070). However, French, ranks 2nd behind English in terms of knowledge of the language.⁵

[11] Moreover, there has been an increase and diversification of the French-speaking population over the years.

[12] The number of Albertans with French as their first official language spoken increased by 35.9% over 20 years (2001-2021).⁶ The number of Albertans with knowledge of French increased by 54.6% over 30 years (1991-2021).⁷

[13] Although many Francophones were born in Alberta, most came from all over Canada and the world. Among Albertans with French as their mother tongue, about 25% were born in Alberta, 50% came from elsewhere in Canada (e.g. Quebec, New Brunswick, Ontario), and 24% came from elsewhere in the world, mainly from Africa.⁸

[14] Furthermore, the French-speaking population is scattered throughout the province, as Francophone communities have historically been established across Alberta.

[15] About one-third of the French-speaking population lives in Calgary, one-third in Edmonton, and the remaining third is scattered among medium-sized cities (Grande Prairie, Fort McMurray, Red Deer, Lethbridge), cities with federal services such as national parks (Jasper, Banff, Canmore) and military bases (Wainwright, Cold Lake), more traditional rural communities (Peace River area, St. Paul,

² Statistics Canada. *Census Profile, 2021 Census of Population, Alberta*.

³ Statistics Canada. *Census Profile, 2021 Census of Population, Alberta*.

⁴ Statistics Canada. *Census Profile, 2021 Census of Population, Alberta*.

⁵ Statistics Canada. *Census Profile, 2021 Census of Population, Alberta*.

⁶ Statistics Canada. 2019. *The French Language in Alberta, 2001 to 2016: Facts and Figures*.

<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/pub/89-657-x/89-657-x2019016-eng.pdf?st=pjEe95Zr>; Statistics Canada. *Census Profile, 2021 Census of Population, Alberta*.

⁷ Statistics Canada. 2019. *The French Language in Alberta, 2001 to 2016*; Statistics Canada. *Census Profile, 2021 Census of Population, Alberta*; Statistics Canada. *Census Profile, 1991 Census of Population, Alberta*; Statistics Canada. *Census Profile, 1996 Census of Population, Alberta*.

⁸ Government of Alberta. 2018. *The Francophonie in Alberta: Strong and Vibrant*. <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/56de91f7-c69e-4fac-8e82-a3b8c9025f25/resource/f4bf7d7f-cda2-4910-9b8e-daeb496553e9/download/albertasfrancophonecommunitiesstrongandvibrant.pdf>

Bonnyville, Legal, Morinville, Beaumont, Plamondon), and newer communities (Edmonton and Calgary Metropolitan regions, Brooks).

[16] This French-speaking population has access to, for example, 43 Francophone schools, four Francophone school boards, nearly 50 Francophone daycares and preschools, one French-language post-secondary institution, 215 schools that offer programs for French learners (e.g., French immersion), and more than 60 community organizations.

Legislative Frameworks

[17] Three pieces of legislation provide an official framework for the provision of services in French in Alberta and the recognition of Alberta's Francophonie: (1) the *Official Languages Act*, (2) the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and (3) the *French Policy*.

[18] At the federal level, Alberta's Francophonie is recognized as an official language community in Canada under the *Official Languages Act*. Adopted in 1969, this federal law recognizes French as one of the country's two official languages and guarantees access to services in French in federal institutions.

[19] In addition, section 23 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* guarantees Canadian citizens whose mother tongue is French, who have received their primary school instruction in French in Canada, or who have a child who has received primary or secondary school instruction in French in Canada, the right to a French-language education of equivalent quality to that provided to the English-speaking majority for all their children. It also guarantees these citizens the right to the management and control of provincially funded French-language educational facilities. Section 23 has the objective of protecting minority Francophone language and cultures and has a "remedial nature" to "correct, on a national scale, the progressive erosion of minority official language groups" and "prevent assimilation."⁹

[20] At the provincial level, Alberta adopted its *French Policy* in 2017, which was revised in 2023, to develop the offer of services in French and thereby increase its access to federal government funds available for this purpose¹⁰, notably through the *Canada-Alberta Agreement on French-Language Services*. This agreement with the federal government's Department of Canadian Heritage is specifically designed to develop the offer of services in French within the province.¹¹

[21] Through the *Policy*, the "Government of Alberta acknowledges the past, present and continued social, cultural and economic contributions of the province's significant and diverse French-speaking population. Through meaningful engagement, dialogue and collaboration, the government is committed to enhancing services in French to support the vitality of the Francophonie in Alberta in a targeted and sustainable manner as resources allow."¹² Furthermore, there are specifics in the *Policy* regarding

⁹ Government of Canada. "Section 23 – Minority language educational rights." <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/csj-sjc/rfc-dlc/ccrf-ccdl/check/art23.html>

¹⁰ Government of Alberta. 2023. *French Policy: enhancing services in French to support the vitality of Alberta's French-speaking communities*. <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/713b7d93-c164-496a-8da8-813a34066ec4/resource/e9a9be57-1625-4bb7-82fb-cdfdb84c83c2/download/cul-french-policy-2023-english.pdf>

¹¹ Francophone Secretariat, Alberta Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women. <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/f8a8b4ed-33e8-4b56-ac75-7aa991a19ce6/resource/e7ad6bd5-937c-4bd7-a9df-a84a9df5fe14/download/cmsw-2018-2019-canada-alberta-agreement-on-french-language-services-application-guidelines.pdf>

¹² Government of Alberta. 2023. *French Policy*, page 6.

education, which reads "the Government of Alberta recognizes that the continued growth and vitality of the Francophonie can be supported by continuing to foster early childhood supports, primary and secondary education, and post-secondary programming in French."¹³

[22] The *Policy* "applies to all Government of Alberta departments, agencies, boards and commissions, and to court services."¹⁴

Issues to consider

[23] Numerous studies have been conducted by researchers on the child care needs of Francophone minority communities in Canada. Three main findings emerge from these studies.

"Dual mission" for Francophone child care services

[24] In Francophone minority communities, child care services have a "dual mission"¹⁵. In addition to having the same functions as educational spaces in the English-speaking majority, educational spaces in Francophone minority communities ensure the transmission of Francophone language and cultures to future generations and contribute to their identity building.¹⁶

[25] Moreover, this mission is all the more crucial for Francophone minority communities, compared to the English-speaking minority community in Quebec, since French is a minority language and in decline in Canada as a whole.¹⁷ As explained in a 2016 study report on early childhood conducted among Francophone minority communities by the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages ("OCOL"), organizations representing English-speaking communities in Quebec expressed that "early childhood services are not a major issue for all of these communities, because the majority of them are not afraid of losing their language."¹⁸

[26] Thus, the mission of Francophone child care services for transmitting language and build identity is essential to ensure the survival of the French language as well as the vitality of Francophone minority communities and to counter learning difficulties among Francophone children.¹⁹

¹³ Government of Alberta. 2023. *French Policy*, page 7.

¹⁴ Government of Alberta. 2023. *French Policy*, page 6.

¹⁵ Marilyne Gauvreau. 2017. "Comprendre la construction identitaire à l'école de la minorité francophone sous l'angle de la reconnaissance." *Cahiers franco-canadiens de l'Ouest*, 29(1), 157-183. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1041201ar>, *Translation from French*.

¹⁶ Marilyne Gauvreau. 2017. "Comprendre la construction identitaire..."; Rodrigue Landry. 2008. "Au-delà de l'école: le projet politique de l'autonomie culturelle." *Francophonie d'Amérique*, (26), 149-183. <https://doi.org/10.7202/037980ar>; Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages. 2016. "Early Childhood: Fostering the Vitality of Francophone Minority Communities." <https://www.clo-ocol.gc.ca/en/publications/other/2016/early-childhood-report>

¹⁷ Radio-Canada. "Le français poursuit son déclin au Canada et au Québec, selon Statistique Canada." August 17, 2022, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1906002/francais-canada-langues-officielles-recensement-immigration>

¹⁸ Commissioner of Official Languages. 2016. "Early Childhood..."

¹⁹ Rodrigue Landry. 2008. "Au-delà de l'école..."; Rodrigue Landry. 2010. "Petite enfance et autonomie culturelle : Là où le nombre le justifie...V." Research report conducted for La Commission nationale des parents francophones. *Institut canadien de recherche sur les minorités linguistiques*. https://cnpf.ca/images/petite-enfance/Petite_enfance-Final_7_mai_2010.pdf;

Rodrigue Landry. 2014. "De la garderie aux études postsecondaires: l'éducation des enfants des CLOSM dans les établissements d'enseignement de la minorité," In *La vie dans une langue officielle minoritaire au Canada* edited by Rodrigue Landry, pages 23-93.; Mireille Vézina and René Houle. 2014. "La transmission de la langue au sein des familles exogames et

[27] Researchers explain that by having access to Francophone child care, the child "will acquire the language skills needed to start school in French with confidence, while becoming familiar with French culture. The fact that they socialize in French will also contribute to their belonging to the community." ²⁰ Children will also have more "chances to maintain their languages." ²¹

[28] As for the vitality of Francophone minority communities, researchers explain that "preschool education would be one of the primary factors in the maintenance and development of Francophone communities, and all necessary measures should be put in place to develop it." ²²

[29] The federal government has recognized the impact of Francophone child care services on Francophone minority communities: "Access to quality childcare services in one's own language is an essential contribution to promoting language learning and use among children, preparing them for school, and anchoring them in a linguistic, cultural and identity path specific to their community."²³

[30] Therefore, access to Francophone child care has a direct impact on Francophone schools guaranteed by section 23 of the *Charter*: "There is a growing consensus in the Canadian Francophonie around the idea that the future of Francophone schools lies at the preschool level." ²⁴ In other words, "early childhood is the foundation of education, and its contribution can no longer be underestimated." ²⁵

[31] Researchers believe that having access to Francophone child care services can solve many problems encountered in Francophone schools. For the time being, many Francophone children arrive in kindergarten and need support, such as francization, especially children from interlinguistic families, formerly called exogamous families (where the mother tongue of one parent is French and the other parent has a different mother tongue), since they have not had as many opportunities to develop their French language skills during early childhood at home, compared to children from endogamous families (where both parents have French as their mother tongue). ²⁶

[32] Thus, the "dual mission" of educational spaces is even more critical for interlinguistic families, as these families represent a significant percentage of Francophone minority communities. In provinces

endogames francophones au Canada." *Cahiers québécois de démographie*, 43(2), p. 399-438.

<https://doi.org/10.7202/1027984ar>.

²⁰ Anne Gilbert and Joseph Yvon Thériault. 2004. "Vers l'institutionnalisation des services à la petite enfance francophone: entre judiciarisation et compromis politique." *Revue de l'Université de Moncton*, vol. 35, n. 2, p. 155-172.

<https://doi.org/10.7202/010647ar>, *Translation from French*.

²¹ Mariette Chartier, Joanne Dumaine and Edmée Sabourin. 2011. "Vivre en français pendant la petite enfance et apprendre à l'école française, y a-t-il un lien?" *Cahiers franco-canadiens de l'Ouest*, 23(1), 3-61. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1017258ar>, *Translation from French*.

²² Anne Gilbert and Joseph Yvon Thériault. 2004. "Vers l'institutionnalisation des services à la petite enfance francophone..." *Translation from French*.

²³ Government of Canada. 2021. *English and French: Towards a substantive equality of official languages in Canada*.

<https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/corporate/publications/general-publications/equality-official-languages.html>

²⁴ Anne Gilbert et Joseph Yvon Thériault. 2004. "Vers l'institutionnalisation des services à la petite enfance francophone..." *Translation from French*.

²⁵ Rodrigue Landry. 2010. "Petite enfance et autonomie culturelle..." *Translation from French*.

²⁶ Anne Gilbert and Joseph Yvon Thériault. 2004. "Vers l'institutionnalisation des services à la petite enfance francophone..."; Mireille Vézina and René Houle. 2014. "La transmission de la langue au sein des familles exogames et endogames francophones au Canada." *Cahiers québécois de démographie*, 43(2), 399-438. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1027984ar>

outside of Québec, including Alberta, children from interlinguistic families represented 56.5% in 1991, and it was 66.8% in 2011.²⁷

[33] A pilot project conducted from 2007 to 2011 in Francophone minority communities, partly in Edmonton, Alberta, illustrates the positive impact of Francophone childcare services on children. The project followed the evolution of Francophone children who participated in a Francophone daycare program, complemented by a parent support program, to understand the effects of these services at the time of school entry. The results show that with access to the program's early childhood education in French, children had a better chance of succeeding academically and achieve "additive bilingualism" (the acquisition of a second language that does not interfere with the acquisition of their mother tongue and cultural identity), compared to those who did not have access to the program.²⁸ The report notes that replicating the success of the program requires human and material resources, parental involvement, commitment from educators to implement and ensure the program's quality, and a role for the Francophone community.²⁹

Child care services by and for Francophones

[34] As mentioned above, having access to Francophone educational spaces is essential, mainly to ensure the vitality of Francophone minority communities. In this regard, researchers go even further by arguing that the vitality of Francophone minority communities is intrinsically linked to their ability to have "institutional completeness". In other words, institutional completeness is the ability of Francophone minority communities to "own institutions" and for those institutions to be "managed by and for" Francophone minority communities.³⁰

[35] The federal government has recognized the importance of institutional completeness, particularly in education, including child care, and has emphasized the role that the provinces must play: "Provincial and territorial governments themselves have linguistic obligations towards their minorities, and this involves supporting and protecting their institutions".³¹

[36] Therefore, accessing English-speaking spaces, where services integrate Francophone language and cultures, is not a viable option. Studies conducted by sociolinguists show that "to counter the risks of assimilation or simply a weakness in the acquisition of one's own mother tongue, they advocate complete immersion in the mother tongue from a young age."³²

²⁷ Mireille Vézina and René Houle. 2014. "La transmission de la langue au sein des familles..."

²⁸ Social Research and Demonstration Corporation. 2016. *Readiness to Learn in Minority Francophone Communities : Program Effects on Children and their Parents*. <https://www.srdc.org/media/199879/program-effects-on-children-and-their-parents.pdf>

²⁹ Social Research and Demonstration Corporation. 2016. *Readiness to Learn in Minority Francophone Communities : Program Implementation Findings*. <https://www.srdc.org/media/199877/program-implementation-findings.pdf>

³⁰ Éric Forgues et al. 2020. "La construction d'espaces francophones comme projet de société en milieu minoritaire." *Minorités linguistiques et société / Linguistic Minorities and Society*, (13), 29-48. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1070389ar>. Translation from French. ; Linda Cardinal and Rémi Léger. 2017. "La complétude institutionnelle en perspective." *Politique et Sociétés* 36, n° 3 : page 3. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1042233ar> Translation from French.

³¹ Government of Canada. 2021. *English and French...*

³² Anne Gilbert and Joseph Yvon Thériault. 2004. "Vers l'institutionnalisation des services à la petite enfance francophone..." Translation from French.

[37] In its 2016 study report, the OCOL also concluded that because of the overwhelming emphasis on English in bilingual services, these services are "being perceived as a form of assimilation for French-speaking children, and community groups agree that these services as not an ideal solution."³³

[38] Although Section 23 of the *Charter* guarantees school governance and infrastructure, equivalent to that of the majority, for Francophones at the primary and secondary levels, one researcher believes that "an institutional infrastructure (daycare, preschool, and early childhood and family centers) specific to early childhood will be necessary to ensure a critical mass of children of rights-holders in Francophone minority schools."³⁴

[39] Thus, having access to Francophone child care services is essential to implement section 23 of the *Charter* fully. If Francophone minority communities cannot access to Francophone child care, researchers believe there is an "anglicization of the children of Francophone rights holders before they enter school."³⁵ Guaranteeing access to Francophone child care services is part of having a "Francophone education continuum" from early childhood to post-secondary education.³⁶

[40] As one researcher explains, a Francophone minority community "needs to be able to manage its early childhood institutions as it does for its education institutions," and this can be done through federal-provincial agreements.³⁷

Alberta's Situation and Several Barriers to Access

[41] According to researchers, Francophone children do not have access to the same equality of opportunity as their English-speaking counterparts in terms of educational success, as many do not have access to Francophone spaces to prepare them for their school years.³⁸

[42] Therefore, in addition to outlining factors that explain the need for access to Francophone child care, much research and studies have focused on highlighting the barriers to such access over the years, illustrating that these barriers are not new.

[43] As early as 2004, researchers believed that Francophone minority communities had access to "a limited range of services, they are poorly funded, and their future is far from assured."³⁹

[44] Using Statistics Canada's 2006 Census data, researchers showed that in Alberta, only 16% of children who benefited from child care before entering school were cared for in a Francophone family dayhome, while 27% attended public or private Francophone daycare centres. Nonetheless, the demand was there, with 47% of parents wanting to enrol their child in a Francophone child care service.⁴⁰

³³ Commissioner of Official Languages. 2016. "Early Childhood..."

³⁴ Rodrigue Landry. 2010. "Petite enfance et autonomie culturelle..." *Translation from French*.

³⁵ Rodrigue Landry. 2008. "Au-delà de l'école..." *Translation from French*.

³⁶ Rodrigue Landry. 2010. "Petite enfance et autonomie culturelle..." *Translation from French*.

³⁷ Rodrigue Landry. 2010. "Petite enfance et autonomie culturelle..."

³⁸ Anne Gilbert and Joseph Yvon Thériault. 2004. "Vers l'institutionnalisation des services à la petite enfance francophone..."

³⁹ Anne Gilbert and Joseph Yvon Thériault. 2004. "Vers l'institutionnalisation des services à la petite enfance francophone..." *Translation from French*.

⁴⁰ Rodrigue Landry. 2014. "De la garderie aux études postsecondaires..."

[45] Although this data is almost 20 years old, barriers to access, unfortunately, remain today.

[46] One study shows that there was an increase in the availability of Francophone child care services in Francophone minority communities between 2006 and 2016.⁴¹ In Alberta, the number of Francophone child care services in facilities, either public or private, increased from three (3) in 2005 to ten (10) in 2016, for an increase of 233%. Consequently, the number of children attending these facility-based child care centers also increased from 89 children in 2005 to 381 children in 2016, a 328% increase. In family dayhomes, it's a slightly more mixed picture. The number of dayhomes fell from seven (7) in 2011 to six (6) in 2016, a decrease of 14%, while the level of child attendance rose from 27 in 2011 to 40 in 2016, an increase of 48%. Thus, researchers pointed out that there has been an increase in the supply of child care and the demand. According to them, the supply of services is then "unsatisfactory to meet the needs of Francophone parents."⁴²

[47] In 2016, the FPFA also commissioned a study, which received funding from the Government of Alberta's Francophone Secretariat, to verify whether the supply of Francophone child care services was sufficient to meet the demand. In 2014, Statistics Canada estimated the demand at 40% of Francophone parents in Alberta, translating into approximately 1,180 Francophone child care spaces. However, the study found that there were only 543 spaces available, representing a shortfall of 630 spaces.⁴³

[48] Since 2016, Alberta's Francophonie has become more organized in the early childhood sector. The FPFA has implemented a management support service, which is a shared service to support all aspects related to service delivery in Francophone child care (e.g., training; resource center; assistance with registration, accreditation, and obtaining grants; enrollment, human resources, and financial management; communication and governance supports). Implementing this service resulted from the findings of the study commissioned by the FPFA. For example, the FPFA provides the same type of services as many English-language organizations funded by the Government of Alberta (e.g., Alberta Resources for Quality Enhancement, Association of Early Childhood Educators of Alberta, Alberta Child Care Ventures, Agencies).⁴⁴

[49] In addition, an Early Childhood Community Working Group was created with the "ambitious goal of creating 1,000 new Francophone child care spaces over the next 10 years"; 268 child care spaces were created since the group was established. The goal of 1,000 new spaces is still not being met, although, in 2023, there are 48 Francophone child care centres in Alberta.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Sociopol. 2017. *Portrait analytique des services à la petite enfance dans les communautés francophones et acadienne en situation minoritaire – 2015-2016*. <https://www.cnpf.ca/images/petite-enfance/Analyse-services-petite-enfance-170519.pdf>

⁴² Sociopol. 2017. *Portrait analytique des services à la petite enfance*...

⁴³ Fédération des parents francophones de l'Alberta. 2016. *Garderies francophones : Augmenter le nombre de places en garderie francophone en Alberta, Défis, réalité et recommandations*. https://fpfa.ab.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Etude_PlaceEnGarderie_MAJ2023.pdf

⁴⁴ Fédération des parents francophones de l'Alberta. 2016. *Garderies francophones*...

⁴⁵ Learn Square Inc. 2023. *Analyse démographique et déserts de garderie : Portrait de la petite enfance francophone en Alberta*. <https://fpfa.ab.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Analyse-demographique-et-deserts-de-garderie-Fevrier-2023.pdf>. Translation from French.

[50] To better understand where the gaps are and the potential demand, the FPFA and the Conseil de développement économique de l'Alberta ("CDÉA") commissioned a study on Francophone child care deserts.⁴⁶

[51] This study is based on Statistics Canada's 2021 Census data and shows that there are deserts in some neighbourhoods in the larger cities, such as Edmonton and Calgary, in several medium-sized cities, such as Fort McMurray and Red Deer, and particularly in Edmonton and Calgary metropolitan regions, such as Airdrie, Beaumont, Cochrane, Fort Saskatchewan, Leduc, Okotoks, Spruce Grove and Stony Plain.⁴⁷ In fact, many cities have no Francophone child care spaces.

[52] Therefore, there is a significant difference when comparing the results of this study on Francophone deserts with data on child care coverage rates in Alberta. The Francophone child care coverage rate is significantly lower than the coverage rates for the province as a whole, and for many regions it is 0%.⁴⁸

[53] To give just a few examples that illustrate this observation, as of February 2023 and according to the 2021 Census data, in Calgary, the coverage rate in Francophone child care services is 19%, while it is 32% in the city's overall child care services. In Edmonton, the coverage rate for Francophone child care services is 14%, while it is 35% for all child care services in the city. Beaumont, Cochrane, Fort Saskatchewan, Leduc, Okotoks, Spruce Grove and Stony Plain have coverage rates between 21% and 39%, but none of the spaces are Francophone. These coverage rates for Francophone child care are far from the 33% coverage rate considered adequate by the Gouvernement of Alberta.⁴⁹

[54] The study also made three recommendations: (1) focus on Edmonton and Calgary to have a solid base, (2) target municipalities with Francophones schools (Airdrie, Bonnyville, Canmore, Cochrane, Cold Lake, Grande Prairie, Okotoks, Sherwood Park and Stony Plain), and (3) target municipalities in Edmonton's metropolitan region where there are no Francophone schools for basic services (Fort Saskatchewan, Leduc, Spruce Grove).⁵⁰

[55] Following the release of this study, Statistics Canada's 2021 Census data on children eligible for Francophone education under Section 23 of the *Charter* was released and included data on eligible children under the age of 5. This data confirmed the significant needs presented in the study while raising an even greater potential. The data drastically accentuates the deserts identified in several locations, tripling or even quadrupling the number of potential Francophone children: Edmonton (4,860), Calgary (5,265), Airdrie (455), Beaumont (180), Cochrane (215), Cold Lake (167), Fort McMurray (500), Fort Saskatchewan (160), Grande Prairie (465), Leduc (165), Lethbridge (235), Okotoks (125), Red Deer (300), Sherwood Park (375), Spruce Grove (175), and St. Albert (345).⁵¹

[56] The study also presented that many child care services are found in Francophone schools.⁵² This reality is inevitable since in many regional Francophone communities, the school is the only place where

⁴⁶ Learn Square Inc. 2023. *Analyse démographique et déserts de garderie...*

⁴⁷ Learn Square Inc. 2023. *Analyse démographique et déserts de garderie...*

⁴⁸ Alberta Purchasing Connection. *Child Care Space Creation Grant*. "Appendix 3: Community Child Care Coverage in Alberta." February 6, 2023.

⁴⁹ Alberta Purchasing Connection. *Child Care Space Creation Grant*. "Appendix 3..."

⁵⁰ Learn Square Inc. 2023. *Analyse démographique et déserts de garderie...*

⁵¹ Statistics Canada. *Census Profile, 2021 Census of Population*.

⁵² Learn Square Inc. 2023. *Analyse démographique et déserts de garderie...*

there are services in French. As research shows: "The school is the community's core in terms of French-language activities and remains the only institution where everything is done in French and where signage and internal and external communications are in French. The Francophone language environment is therefore very limited outside the school."⁵³

[57] However, while having French-language child care services in Francophone schools is an ideal situation, especially to ensure a Francophone education continuum and since the facilities are "affordable"⁵⁴, there are a few issues that pose challenges to achieving this goal. The OCOL notes that these facilities are "rare" and "will be increasingly unable to meet the needs of communities in the years to come, because of the growing demand for child care and because many schools are not able to provide facilities."⁵⁵ When a school runs out of space, school boards are often forced to ask child care service providers to find new facilities, and these facilities are more expensive.⁵⁶

[58] Another challenge to expanding Francophone child care is access to a French-speaking workforce, including early childhood educators. The OCOL notes that a lack of funding and training causes this shortage. In fact, it explains that it is "difficult to retain educators in minority communities because sometimes they can be better paid in equivalent positions in majority communities."⁵⁷ The OCOL also noted a lack of infrastructure, as "the demand for child care spaces exceeds the capacity of the available infrastructure."⁵⁸

Recommendations

[59] In November 2021, the Government of Alberta and the federal government signed *the Canada-Alberta Early Learning and Child Care Agreement - 2021-2025*⁵⁹ ("Agreement"). The *Agreement*, its action plan, and its four focus areas were released in the summer of 2022.

[60] The *Agreement* includes several references that directly relate to the needs of Alberta's Francophonie:

- With respect to "developing and delivering its programs and services in early learning and child care, Alberta agrees to take into account the needs of official language minority communities in Alberta."
- Under families more in need, this includes "families from official language minority communities" and that "needs also include having limited or no access to programs and services in the children's official language."
- In the area of accessibility, there is a reference to the principle that families should have access to child care services that "aligns with... linguistic preferences."
- As for investments, they may be used to provide "cultural and linguistic supports".⁶⁰

⁵³ Mariette Chartier, Joanne Dumaine and Edmée Sabourin. 2011. "Vivre en français pendant la petite enfance..."

⁵⁴ Commissioner of Official Languages. 2016. "Early Childhood..."

⁵⁵ Commissioner of Official Languages. 2016. "Early Childhood..."

⁵⁶ Commissioner of Official Languages. 2016. "Early Childhood..."

⁵⁷ Commissioner of Official Languages. 2016. "Early Childhood..."

⁵⁸ Commissioner of Official Languages. 2016. "Early Childhood..."

⁵⁹ Canada-Alberta Early Learning and Child Care Agreement – 2021 to 2025. <https://www.canada.ca/en/early-learning-child-care-agreement/agreements-provinces-territories/alberta-2021.html>

⁶⁰ Canada-Alberta Early Learning and Child Care Agreement – 2021 to 2025.

[61] In addition to its obligations under the *Agreement*, the Government of Alberta is committed to consulting with stakeholders within Alberta's Francophonie in implementing its *French Policy* and developing action plans for its implementation. The Government of Alberta is in the process of drafting a new action plan. To determine priorities, the *Policy* states that the Government of Alberta's Francophone Secretariat "will be informed by the objectives and priorities set by the diverse stakeholders serving the province's French-speaking population, such as the ACFA and the Francophone regional school authorities."⁶¹

[62] Below, we present recommendations for meeting the language requirements of the *Agreement* and implementing the *French Policy*.

[63] These recommendations consider the *Agreement's* priority investment areas and approaches, and are based on data. This data includes the research presented in the previous section, the *Action Plan for Alberta's Francophonie 2023-2028*⁶², developed by the ACFA following a rigorous consultation process with stakeholders within Alberta's Francophonie, and a consultation session conducted by the FPFA with its early childhood stakeholders on March 22, 2023.

[64] Specifically, the consultations for the *Action Plan for Alberta's Francophonie 2023-2028* identified the priorities of the Alberta Francophonie for the successful implementation of the *Policy* on Francophonie in the early childhood sector. These priorities include "Improve access to French-language child care services for French-speaking children through initiatives that promote accessibility, quality, safety, inclusion, and parental choice" and to do so, "Consult with the FPFA to identify the needs related to Francophone child care services (e.g., deserts, subsidies for parents) and develop a specific action plan for Alberta's Francophonie so that an equitable share of child care funding is allocated to Francophones across the province."⁶³ These priority actions are directly linked to the priority objectives of the Ministry of Children's Services.

Affordability

[65] To meet its commitments to the *Agreement's* priority investment areas and the "affordability" approach, Alberta has committed to reducing parent fees to an average of \$10 per day by 2026.

[66] To meet the needs of Alberta's Francophonie, the ACFA and FPFA recommend that the Government of Alberta **implement an additional financial incentive for families enrolled in Francophone child care**. As shown in the study on deserts commissioned by the FPFA and CDÉA, Francophone child care services are sparse or remote, which creates additional costs for most parents who drive long distances to use these services daily.

Accessibility

[67] To meet its commitments to the *Agreement's* priority investment areas and the "accessibility" approach Alberta has committed to creating 42,500 new regulated child care spaces by 2026.

⁶¹ Government of Alberta. 2023. *French Policy*, page 8.

⁶² ACFA. 2022. *Action Plan for Alberta's Francophonie 2023-2028*. https://acfa.ab.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Version-officielle_Plan-daction-FRAB_EN.pdf

⁶³ ACFA. 2022. *Action Plan for Alberta's Francophonie 2023-2028*, p.14.

[68] To meet the needs of Alberta's Francophonie, particularly to address the issue of limited infrastructure and spaces relative to demand, the ACFA and FPFA recommend three solutions to the Government of Alberta.

[69] First, **use the results of the desert study commissioned by the FPFA and CDÉA to provide equitable funding for creating new Francophone child care spaces (Early Learning and Child Care)**. As presented above, comparing the study's results to the coverage rate data for the whole province showed that the coverage rate for Francophone child care services is well below that. Thus, we can say that Francophone communities across the province are under-served, even though there is a great demand for these services.

[70] Second, **provide operational funding for Francophone rural child care and family dayhome services to maintain their service and retain staff**. As noted above, family dayhome services are much less developed than facility-based child care. Child care enrolment in rural communities is often volatile, threatening the stability of the already hard-to-find workforce. A "necessity-based child care" funding would ensure the sustainability of the service.

[71] Third, **fund and recognize the operating and maintenance costs of early childhood spaces in Francophone schools**. As noted above, having Francophone child care services in Francophone schools has been a preferred approach for several reasons. Except for a few recent infrastructure projects in Alberta, the school board or parent fees fund child care spaces in Francophone schools. The Government of Alberta needs to recognize these spaces in the Francophone school board occupancy rate for their contribution to the Francophone education continuum and strengthen the link between the early childhood and education sectors.

Inclusion

[72] To meet its commitments to the *Agreement's* priority investment areas and the "inclusion" approach, the Government of Alberta is committed to (1) ensuring equitable and inclusive access for all children requiring child care, regardless of their mental, physical or societal condition; (2) ensuring proportional funding for the Francophone population; and (3) working with the Francophone Secretariat to better understand and meet the needs of Alberta's Francophonie.

[73] To meet the needs of Alberta's Francophonie, the ACFA and FPFA recommend three solutions to the Government of Alberta, which include ensuring the provision of child care services by and for Francophones.

[74] First, **create a financial incentive to support the sharing of administrative services in child care services by and for Francophones**. In Alberta, several Francophone entities manage different child care services (e.g., FPFA, school boards, parents' associations, regional ACFA's). Moreover, as mentioned above, the FPFA offers some assistance through a management support service to several Francophone child care centres, a similar service as Anglophone entities provide. The Government of Alberta committed in its *French Policy* and in the *Agreement* to providing equitable services in French to those already available in English. As such, the Government of Alberta should encourage sharing child care administrative services by and for Francophones to provide Francophones with equal access to child care services. This sharing would achieve scale economies, encourage new space creation, and maintain existing services. Shared services could work together on human resource

management (recruitment, retention and back-up network), coaching, analytical support and financial management.

[75] Second, still through shared services by and for francophones, **support the creation of a team of early childhood experts to address the special needs of Francophone children with vulnerabilities (e.g. disabilities, newcomers, francization, speech therapy, etc.).** Services currently offered through English-language organizations (e.g., GRIT) are insufficient to meet Francophones' needs.

[76] Third, **implement a financial incentive to encourage the development of Francophone language and cultures within spaces by and for Francophones, as well as the acquisition of educational resources, awareness workshops, and resources for families in French.** As presented above, Francophone communities must have institutional completeness and Francophone spaces. The financial incentive would allow Alberta's Francophonie to access resources necessary to offer comprehensive programming adapted to Francophones' needs and ensure that children attend immersive environments where everything from signage to educational resources are in French.

Quality

[77] Finally, to fulfill its commitments to the *Agreement's* priority investment areas and "quality" approach, Alberta committed to (1) maintain the salary top-up for staff and increase the number of hours provided in administration; (2) making the *Flight* curriculum available to educators; (3) facilitating *Brain Story* certification on brain development; (4) providing tools and training to assess child development; and (5) providing training in infant and child mental health first aid, nutrition and physical literacy.

[78] To address the needs of Alberta's Francophonie, particularly for the issue of Francophone labour shortages and lack of training, the ACFA and FPFA recommend two solutions to the Government of Alberta.

[79] First, **provide an additional salary top-up for staff working in Francophone child care in Alberta.** As presented above, Francophone child care in Francophone minority communities has a "dual mission." Consequently, staff working in these Francophone child care services also have a dual mandate in their daily responsibilities, namely child development and identity building. The Government of Alberta should offer compensation in recognition of the language and identity skills that staff must possess, in addition to all the other skills that their English-speaking counterparts possess. This initiative would help retain a Francophone workforce that is already difficult to recruit.

[80] Second, **provide a service by and for Francophones to support Francophone educators' professional developmental needs, which would have a greater impact on recruiting and retaining a Francophone workforce.** For Francophone child care to meet its identity building mandate, professional development needs to be adapted to Francophones' needs. If the resources used are only translations, they will not include the principles of transmitting the Francophone language and cultures, which are unique to Francophone minority communities as presented above. Since 2016, the FPFA has offered a similar service tailored to Francophones' needs. Thus, financially supporting a service by and for Francophones will ensure the delivery of *Flight* and *Brain Story* resources and tools to assess child development. Currently, Anglophone organizations (e.g. Alberta Resource Centre for Quality Enhancement) offer these services.