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## L'ÉCOLE MAURICE-LAVALLÉE

**Statement by:**

**The Honourable Claudette Tardif**

**Monday, December 14, 2009**

## THE SENATE

Monday, December 14, 2009

[*Translation*]

### L'ÉCOLE MAURICE-LAVALLÉE

**Hon. Claudette Tardif (Deputy Leader of the Opposition):** Honourable senators, it is my great pleasure to highlight the 25th anniversary of l'École Maurice-Lavallée in Edmonton, the first francophone school to have received public funding.

During its first 10 years, the Maurice Lavallée school was run by Edmonton Catholic Schools. In 1994, it became one of the first five schools under a francophone board, the Conseil scolaire Centre-Nord.

Today, I am proud to see that the Maurice Lavallée school has an outstanding reputation for excellence in all areas of school life in Alberta. However, we must not forget that francophone parents worked long and hard to take control of their school and help it achieve that distinction.

Honourable senators, I am very proud to have been an active participant in the negotiations 25 years ago to ensure recognition for the right to minority language instruction under section 23 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which governs education rights in official language minority communities. That section was instrumental in helping francophones take control of their own schools. I would also like to recognize the important role played by Senator Jean-Robert Gauthier in moving this file forward.

It took many years of intense negotiations for francophone parents to get their first French-language school in Alberta and

then to manage their own schools. Before the Charter was enshrined in the Constitution in 1982, there were no publicly funded French-language schools in Alberta. I was a member of the first parents' committee that fought to establish the Maurice Lavallée school. We had to jump through a lot of hoops to persuade the province, the school board and all the authorities, and to change people's attitudes and the organizational culture concerning the education rights of francophones. The Charter lent legitimacy to the demands made by parents to the provincial government, school boards and local authorities. A tenacious group of parents had to go to court — all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada — to ensure respect for their rights under the Charter.

I would like to pay tribute to all of the people who got involved and worked tirelessly, relentlessly and passionately for all those years to lay the foundation for French-language education in Alberta and to build it up from there.

There are now more than 30 French-language schools in Alberta, five school boards and over 5,000 students. Those numbers are sure to go up because so many francophones have immigrated to Alberta and want their children to be educated in French.

On this, the 25th anniversary of the Maurice Lavallée school, allow me to honour its priceless contribution to our community and to salute francophone parents' determination to overcome all obstacles.

Long live l'école Maurice-Lavallée!

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