



NEWS RELEASE

Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages

Senate Committee on Official Languages recommends increasing bilingualism of Canadian youth

OTTAWA, June 16, 2015 — The Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages today tabled its most recent report, [*Aiming Higher: Increasing Bilingualism of our Canadian Youth*](#).

The report contains 10 recommendations focusing on four specific areas: active promotion of bilingualism; increased fluency in both official languages; innovative practices; and funding. The Senate Committee believes that the federal government has a leadership role to play in ensuring that bilingualism takes its rightful place as a fundamental Canadian value.

“The Senate Committee laments the declining proportion of Canadian youth who can hold a conversation in both English and French. This issue must be taken very seriously. The status quo is no longer an option. We believe that clear and ambitious objectives should be set for the future of bilingualism. The Senate Committee believes it is important to immediately take measures to improve the status and equality of Canada’s official languages. We are convinced that a firm commitment from the federal government to actively promote bilingualism and improve official-language proficiency across the country is not only desirable, but also essential.”

Senator Claudette Tardif, Chair

“Much has already been done to increase the bilingualism of Canadian youth. But it is not enough. We must aim higher. As one young witness told us, ‘To learn a language, you have to live the language.’ Students must feel motivated to use their second language in contexts beyond the classroom, for example, with their friends, online, through the media, through post-secondary studies in their second language, and through cultural activities. We encourage the federal government to take note of the good practices listed in this report.”

Senator Suzanne Fortin-Duplessis, Deputy Chair

The report’s recommendations

- That Canadian Heritage, acknowledging that education is an area of shared jurisdiction and pursuant to its responsibilities under subsection 43(1) of the *Official Languages Act* with respect to the learning of English and French in Canada, ensure second-language programs are accessible to everyone, everywhere in Canada.

- That Canadian Heritage, pursuant to its responsibilities under subsection 43(1) of the *Official Languages Act*, encourage the public and the business community to foster the recognition and use of the two official languages, and that it launch a national awareness campaign to encourage Canadians to learn their official languages.
- That Canadian Heritage work with the provincial and territorial governments and consult with language organizations, school boards and teachers to establish a specific, measurable objective to increase official-language proficiency among Canadians, particularly youth aged 15 to 19, by 2018.
- That Canadian Heritage acknowledge the importance of continued language learning after secondary school by helping colleges and universities develop more official-language programs, and by allocating the necessary resources to them.
- That Canadian Heritage work with the provincial and territorial governments to establish a common Canadian framework of reference for languages that includes common reference levels for language teaching, learning and evaluation in Canada, by 2018.
- That Canadian Heritage immediately increase its support for language and cultural exchanges for both students and teachers.
- That Canadian Heritage encourage the media to play an active role in promoting Canada's official languages by building on the practices of TV5 Québec-Canada and TFO Éducation.
- That Canadian Heritage invest in sound research with an emphasis on innovative practices and that it disseminate the latest research results in the areas of official language promotion and language learning.
- That Canadian Heritage maintain, or even increase, its investments in official-language promotion and learning, taking into account the four priorities identified in this report, namely, the active promotion of bilingualism; increased official language proficiency; innovative practices; and funding.
- That Canadian Heritage improve current accountability practices to ensure the funds invested under the federal-provincial/territorial agreements are used wisely.

Quick facts

- During its study, which began in the spring of 2013, the Committee held 19 meetings and heard from 51 witnesses representing a variety of interests, including those of educational institutions, government officials, researchers, young people, parents, teachers, the media and non-profit organizations.
- Since the early 1970s, a significant portion of the federal government's investment in official languages has gone to second-language learning.
- In 2011–2012, there were 2.4 million young Canadians learning English or French as a second language in elementary and secondary schools across the country.
- In 2011–2012, approximately 350,000 anglophone students were enrolled in French immersion programs.

- Close to 62,000 students have participated in intensive French programs since they were introduced in Canada in 1998.
- The proportion of students in public school enrolled in a core French program has decreased compared with 20 years earlier, dropping from 53% in 1991 to 44% in 2011.

Related links

Click here to see the [infographic](#) from *Aiming Higher: Increasing Bilingualism of our Canadian Youth*.

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Click [here](#) to learn more about the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages and its work.

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