

Constitutional Rights at the Kitchen Table: British Columbia Francophones and the Making of a Minority-Language Educational System

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ABSTRACT

In a recent landmark decision, the Supreme Court of Canada confirmed that the underfunding of British Columbia's Conseil scolaire francophone constitutes a breach of Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees in matters of minority-language education. While this marked the end of a decade of judicial proceedings, this article situates the decision in a broader historical context by examining the struggle to develop French-language educational programs in BC. If the province did not experience the education crises that tore through other parts of Canada in the decades following Confederation, BC francophones seized on the growing acceptance of bilingualism in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s to fight for an education system catering to their linguistic and cultural aspirations. Shifting the scholarly focus from the constitutional negotiating tables at which sat politicians and high-level bureaucrats to the kitchen tables around which parent groups gathered to formulate their demands, this article traces the grassroots battle to bring French-language schools to the province with Canada's highest rate of linguistic assimilation.

RÉSUMÉ

Dans une importante décision récente, la Cour suprême du Canada a confirmé que le sous-financement du Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique constitue une violation de la Charte canadienne des droits et libertés en matière d'éducation en langue minoritaire. Si le jugement a mis fin à une décennie de procédures juridiques, le présent article situe cette décision dans un contexte historique plus large en examinant la lutte pour le développement de programmes scolaires en langue française en Colombie-Britannique. Bien que la province n'ait pas connu les crises scolaires qui ont déchiré d'autres régions du Canada au cours des décennies suivant la Confédération, les francophones de Colombie-Britannique ont saisi l'acceptation grandissante du bilinguisme dans les années 1970, 1980 et 1990 en exigeant un système éducatif répondant à leurs aspirations linguistiques et culturelles. Porté sur la dynamique non pas des tables de négociations constitutionnelles occupées par les politiciens et les fonctionnaires, mais plutôt des tables de cuisines autour desquelles les groupes de parents se sont réunis pour formuler leurs demandes, cet article retrace la bataille de terrain pour l'ouverture d'écoles francophones dans la province avec le plus haut taux d'assimilation linguistique au pays.

In June 2020, British Columbia francophones celebrated a landmark ruling by the Supreme Court of Canada. The court recognized that chronic underfunding of the Conseil scolaire francophone (CSF), BC's French-language school board, had infringed upon constitutionally guaranteed rights to minority-language education, and it ordered the province to provide several communities with school facilities equivalent to those enjoyed by anglophone families.¹ For the CSF, BC's francophone parents' federation, and many families involved in the process, this was the culmination of ten years of legal battles. In Canadian political history, it was the latest chapter in a series of battles for minority-language education dating back to Confederation. Since the adoption of official bilingualism in 1969 and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982, francophone groups have acquired a political legitimacy and legal grounding they previously lacked when making educational demands. As historian Michael Behiels argues, the 1980s and 1990s were a crucial period as francophones across the country immersed themselves in constitutional politics, capitalizing on the courts' remedial interpretation of charter rights in order to secure and consolidate control over minority-language education, and indeed, to redefine their identities as francophone communities.²

Today, twenty-eight minority francophone school districts serve 174,000 pupils in 700 schools across Canada.³ The CSF case shows that minority-language education continues to be a question of high politics and jurisprudence in Canada, since francophone communities still rely on the courts in their efforts to wrest governance rights and funding from recalcitrant provincial and territorial education ministries. Examining the same period as Behiels, this article seeks to shift the focus away from constitutional negotiating tables to the kitchen tables around which parent groups gathered to press local schools to transmit francophone language and culture to their children. If educational rights were hammered out in boardrooms and courtrooms, I argue, it was in their own dining rooms that parents across the province mobilized to demand school openings. They strove to convince others to join the fight, or at least to enrol their children in nascent programs, and ultimately to coalesce as communities bound by a desire to perpetuate the use of the French language in various corners of a predominantly anglophone province. As Renée Poutissou, the leader of a local parents' association, later recalled, it was around her family's table that she and fellow BC francophones spent "untold hours" preparing recruitment efforts and workshops, writing grant applications, learning the intricacies of federal-provincial relations, fighting for additional funds from the education ministry—all while raising her two sons and holding part-time employment.⁴ Her experience resembled that of many parents across the province.

By the 1970s, most British Columbians residing in urban or semi-rural communities could expect to find majority-language schools in relative proximity to their homes. Although the provincial government declared a policy to "make it possible for parents to have a choice of either official language (of Canada) as the language of instruction for their children,"⁵ francophones understood that minority-language programs would not be offered as a matter of course. The policy would be implemented only when requested, requiring the grassroots engagement of parents and

community organizers determined to see official francophone classes offered in their neighbourhoods. This article traces these efforts between the launch of the first educational programs geared specifically to the francophone minority in the late 1970s to the creation of the CSF in the mid-1990s. BC had entered Confederation with a pre-existing non-denominational and anglophone public school system. As a result, it had initially been spared the crisis of what historians call “the school question,” a series of high-profile confrontations between Catholic, often francophone, minorities and provincial authorities that tore through New Brunswick, Ontario, and the Prairie provinces in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁶ For francophones on the west coast, the battle for schools would emerge later, in a period marked by a new round of political tensions over the place of the French language in Canada.

French speakers were not the only ethnolinguistic community to challenge the legacy of what scholars have described as “one of the highest priorities of politicians, educational policy-makers, and the public”: developing a school system that would assimilate children of a broad range of backgrounds into Anglo-Canadian culture.⁷ Across BC and western Canada, Indigenous families had long grappled with an education system designed to annihilate their culture, factions of the Doukhobor community had torched schools to protest governmental authority, students with Chinese and Japanese backgrounds had endured segregation and exclusion, and families of European extraction had lobbied for the teaching of such languages as German, Polish, or Ukrainian.⁸ Unlike those communities, however, BC francophones had the federal government’s vision of a bilingual country in which to root their claims. By the period covered here, policy-makers and curriculum designers were becoming increasingly sensitive to Canada’s multicultural dynamics and to the teaching of “heritage languages,”⁹ creating a political and social context more favorable to challenging the Anglo-normativity on which BC’s education system was founded. But francophones refrained from presenting their demands through the lens of multiculturalism. Wary of policies they feared would reduce them to the status of but one out of many ethnic minorities,¹⁰ they made no reference to the demands of other linguistic or ethnic communities in formulating their own. Instead, they justified their school claims on the basis of membership in one of the language groups recognized by the legislation and policies of official bilingualism.

As a 1975 report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) on educational policy in Canada noted, British Columbia was the “one province [that] has taken no special measures to promote bilingualism.”¹¹ The absence of such schools, francophones in the province suggested, revealed the limits of Canadian federalism. That the considerable amounts the federal government had earmarked for minority-language education were not translating into new programs in BC was a sign of provincial intolerance that was unique in Canada.¹² It was in leveraging federal discourse that the community perceived an opportunity to advance its cause on the provincial scene. Facing high assimilation rates, British Columbia francophones insisted that minority-language schools were key not only to stave off threats to the community’s existence, but to ensure its full participation in the project of Canadian official linguistic duality.

Legal Recourses

The BC education ministry policy mentioned above made reference both to immersion programs and the Programme cadre de français (PCF). Immersion programs had existed in the province since the late 1960s, but these were designed primarily to teach French to children of the majority-language community. For francophone community leaders and many parents, second-language immersion did not fulfil their demands for schools intended specifically to foster the language abilities and cultural identity of their children.¹³ Although this article tells a bottom-up story of community mobilization for the creation and consolidation of native-language educational structures like the PCF and the CSF, BC francophones have relied on the judicial system to strengthen their minority-language claims since the 1980s. In 2010, another round of litigation began as separate petitions were filed in the Supreme Court of British Columbia by the parents' association of École Rose-des-vents in Vancouver, a French-language school opened on Vancouver's west side in 1997,¹⁴ and by the CSF and the Fédération des parents francophones de Colombie-Britannique (FPFCB) regarding conditions in some seventeen communities across BC, including in Greater Vancouver, the Fraser Valley, the Sea-to-Sky corridor, Vancouver Island, the Sunshine Coast, the Okanagan, and the Kootenays.¹⁵ Both cases centred on the argument that French-language schools in these areas were overcrowded or in poor physical condition and were located far from students' homes, requiring long commutes. In some places, no school had ever been opened, despite the presence of a francophone population large enough to warrant one. To some extent, their claims resembled those of earlier generations of anglophone families in rural British Columbia, where geographical isolation and poor physical conditions made schools unattractive and resulted in low attendance and high rates of staff turnover.¹⁶ Just as those parents had pointed to disparities in comparison to urban schools, these francophone petitioners argued that their children did not have access to resources equivalent to those available to their anglophone counterparts. Many parents chose instead to send their children to local majority-language schools, which they deemed to be in better condition and easier to access. The lack of viable minority-language schooling opportunities, they added, resulted in an inability for francophones to exercise their constitutionally guaranteed rights and threatened to accelerate already high rates of linguistic assimilation.

While the Rose-des-vents parents initially received a favourable judgment from the BC Supreme Court, which ruled that francophone minority language rights were indeed compromised by the inadequate facilities, the decision was later overturned by the BC Court of Appeal.¹⁷ In April 2015, the Supreme Court of Canada sided with the parents, reinstating the BC Supreme Court ruling.¹⁸ In parallel, the larger CSF- and FBFCB-led petition, which also examined issues pertaining to the Rose-des-vents situation, was heard by the Supreme Court of British Columbia between December 2013 and February 2016. The judgment, handed down by Justice Loryl Russel in September 2016, was presented as a "partial victory" by the petitioners.¹⁹ They noted that the judge agreed that charter rights had been violated in four

communities and pointed to the financial compensation they were attributed as reparation for inadequate bussing services, as well as to two favourable declarations: that the education ministry should create a separate funding envelope specifically for CSF capital projects and that it should put in place a dispute resolution mechanism for handling the CSF's negotiations with anglophone boards in matters pertaining to its need for school sites. Yet the Russel decision also rejected the claims regarding conditions in several other communities, and for others stipulated that, while shortcomings existed, any rights breaches were nonetheless "reasonably justified in a free and democratic society," according to the judge's interpretation of section 1 of the charter.²⁰ Taking issue with the "restrictive" reading the judge had made of minority language rights, the petitioners appealed parts of the decision. They argued that Russel defined equivalency between majority and minority language education in ways that would systematically disadvantage the minority and disputed the judge's interpretation of justifiable restrictions of charter rights. In July 2018, the BC Court of Appeal upheld the lower court judgment and furthermore overturned the ruling regarding compensation for the bussing system.²¹ This set the stage for an ultimate appeal by the petitioners to the Supreme Court of Canada. In a decision written by Chief Justice Richard Wagner, the Supreme Court agreed that charter rights had been unduly breached, and it overturned the lower court ruling, ordering that at least eight additional schools be opened and that the compensation for the bussing system be restored while also awarding additional financial reparations.

This article builds on research conducted in the context of these proceedings using scholarly works, theses, local histories, institutional histories, brochures, and websites produced by francophone cultural organizations, and the province's French-language newspapers, in particular, *Le Soleil*, the 1968–1998 publication that coincided with crucial years of minority-language lobbying in BC. With an editorial line firmly favouring expanded French programs, the paper reported on the progress of lobbying efforts and ran opinion columns articulating arguments showing such programs to be necessary to fulfill the promise of official bilingualism in the province.²² The research also draws largely on the records of the FPFCEB. Founded in 1979 just as the first publicly funded French-language programs were launched in British Columbia, the FPFCEB supported parents seeking such classes in their communities and helped coordinate their efforts. This documentation, comprised of correspondence with parents, schools, and the Ministry of Education, meeting minutes, internal reports, and monthly newsletters, reveals how, far from the halls of power, parents waged the battle for francophone schools on the ground, forming local associations, undertaking recruitment efforts, sparring with school administrations, and at times, confronting xenophobic sentiments.²³ Although this documentation mainly presents the perspective of those formulating the demand for minority-language schools, it also contains numerous letters, ministry documents, and newspaper clippings giving the views of the majority linguistic community, whether sympathetic or averse to such programs. Additional anglophone perspectives were gleaned through published Ministry of Education documents and local newspapers.

From Colonial to Parochial to Public Schools

The creation of the Programme cadre de français in the late 1970s itself represented the culmination of decades of lobbying. The notion that schools might function in the French language was not new to BC in this period. Indeed, it dated to the beginnings of the settler colonial project in the mid-nineteenth century. Many of the workers hired by fur trading companies operating in the area were Métis, French Canadian, or from Indigenous communities in Quebec, so much so that French established itself as the *lingua franca* of the fur trade era.²⁴ As this settlement became increasingly permanent, Roman Catholic missionaries arrived with the dual aim of ministering to settlers and proselytizing to Indigenous communities. Given the linguistic makeup of the nascent settler society, they were drawn to a large extent from orders established in Quebec and France, in particular the Sisters of Saint Anne and the Oblates of Mary Immaculate respectively. These orders opened missions and schools across the territory, gradually adopting English as that language became dominant following the influx of colonists in the wake of the 1858 Fraser River gold rush.²⁵ In so doing, they laid the groundwork for what would become the residential school system, whose legacy of violent cultural genocide has only recently become better understood.²⁶ Although current historical interpretation is critical of this reality, francophone community members of the 1970s to the 1990s frequently referenced the long-standing use of the French language in the province in their education-related correspondence, strategy documents, and publications. BC francophones were not descendants of these earlier settlers, their community having been built by successive waves of arrivals from Quebec, other Canadian provinces, and Europe. But the longevity of a francophone presence in the province implied a historical continuity that they could marshal in legitimating their claims to the full linguistic rights of a founding people.²⁷ That the more than 100,000 tax-paying francophones in the province did not have their own schools was considered an “aberration” by some in light of the fact that one of the first schools to exist in nineteenth-century BC had operated in French.²⁸

By the time British Columbia entered Confederation in 1871 the new province had already developed a firmly secular education system, enshrined in the 1869 Public Schools Act. Thus, the provisions of the British North America Act that guaranteed the continued existence of denominational schools in other provinces did not apply to BC. This political “consensus” generated vocal protest from Catholics, Anglicans, and evangelical Protestant supporters of public religious education.²⁹ For decades, the only schools in BC to offer education in French were Catholic parish establishments dependent upon two churches in Maillardville, a francophone enclave established in the Vancouver suburb of Coquitlam and populated by the families of workers recruited beginning in 1909 to the lumber industry along the Fraser River, and later Saint-Sacrement School, opened in 1954 within the city itself. To no avail, clergy members and community leaders lobbied the provincial government to finance this small Catholic system. Their most visible action was the school “strike” of 1951–52, held to protest the mandatory school taxes required of parents paying Catholic school

fees. Without warning, 840 pupils were removed from the Maillardville parochial schools and sent to local public schools with the intention of flooding a public system already tearing at the seams under postwar demographic pressures. The secretary of the Coquitlam school district declared that new teachers would be hired and that the school day would function on double shifts.³⁰ A year and a half later, provincial officials remained unmoved, and the parochial schools ultimately resumed operations.³¹

As was the case in the colonial era, the Maillardville parochial schools functioned in French because that was the language spoken by most Catholics residing there. Into the second half of the twentieth century, population growth and the perception of greater social mobility associated with the English language led the population to diversify and anglicize such that the use of French in these schools and parishes rapidly diminished.³² Yet it was during this same period that French-language instruction programs for non-francophones truly “took off.”³³ In the context of Quebec’s Quiet Revolution and the subsequent promotion of official bilingualism by the federal government, both French as a second language and French immersion programs attracted ever-growing numbers of students in BC, as in the rest of Canada.³⁴

With a provincial government opposed to funding religious education but that saw a growing openness to the French language in English Canada, British Columbia’s francophone federation, now known as the Fédération des francophones de la Colombie-Britannique (FFCB), resolved to lobby for publicly funded, secular, French-language schools. Although this caused bitter divisions within the FFCB,³⁵ most in the organization felt that new waves of French-speakers arriving from Quebec were less connected than earlier generations to traditional institutions like the Catholic church. FFCB leadership maintained that given the political situation, only better schooling in French would ensure the long-term viability of the community.³⁶

Appeals to education ministry officials were met with the response that British Columbia comprised many linguistic groups who could not all have their own schools, and that the government wished to avoid isolating francophone children.³⁷ In refusing to fund a francophone program, the government was displaying its indifference towards its responsibilities in matters of education as well as its commitment to support a bilingual and united Canada, wrote one editorialist in *Le Soleil*.³⁸ This attitude, added another contributor, amounted to the assassination of the rights of francophones who had worked to build the province and an affront to the human dignity of those who sought to preserve their culture. In the current state of affairs, he added, the ideal of official bilingualism was “doomed to fail.”³⁹ To the suggestion that bilingual schools could provide a workable solution, the response was equally adamant. The purpose of immersion was to teach French to non-native speakers, and the francophone community demanded schools of its own. The distinction was “of primary importance.”⁴⁰ Would it not be absurd, mused *Le Soleil*’s editor André Piolat, if the sums invested for English speakers to learn French were to be wasted should there be no francophones left to whom they might speak.⁴¹

It was in the aftermath of the 1976 election of the sovereigntist Parti Québécois that British Columbia ultimately decided to fund French-language public schools,

justifying the about-face as a way for the province to contribute to shoring up a weakened sense of national cohesion. Pat McGeer, the education minister, made the announcement in August 1977 and members of the FFCB met with Premier Bill Bennett in what was described as a warm atmosphere.⁴² Ministry officials spent the following year designing the program and when classes began in September 1979, 213 students were registered.⁴³

The PCF, created initially for children in kindergarten to grade 7, mirrored the regular English provincial curriculum with the exception that the language of instruction was French, and English was taught as a second language. It was to be made available if the parents of at least “10 pupils who know French well enough to receive instruction in the language” requested it.⁴⁴ Teachers were expected to be fluent in French, and costs related to hiring, transportation, supplies, administration, and facilities were covered by the province. The purpose of the PCF was not simply to teach in French, but also to offer students greater exposure to and appreciation of their francophone culture. Subjects like history, geography, and art were designed to help children situate themselves within a broader francophone world.⁴⁵ The ministry also recommended that francophone classes be opened within existing schools, rather than in separate buildings.⁴⁶ Whereas both the PCF and immersion had been created to give parents the opportunity to have their children educated in the minority official language, the Ministry of Education took care to specify that the Programme cadre was to be reserved for francophone students, defined as having at least one francophone parent or guardian; it was not intended as a substitute for immersion.⁴⁷ The adoption of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982 formalized the right to minority-language education on the basis of parents’ first language learned and still understood, or who had received their own primary education in French.⁴⁸

Building the PCF

In a recent study of the lead-up to the creation of the PCF, political scientists Rémi Léger and Nicholas Poulos argue that the national political climate, more than community mobilization itself, ultimately provoked the provincial government’s about-face on French-language schools. And even then, the PCF was a qualified success because it only covered the primary grades. Nor did it initially create the francophone schools that so many in the community longed for, but rather a “French cohort” within English-language schools.⁴⁹ Indeed, with the PCF now officially on the books and initial interest high, the challenge was to make the program viable. This required recruiting a critical mass of students and increasing the number of schools in which it was offered. If the national unity crisis of the 1970s had generated in BC a context favourable to the approval of the new program, its expansion depended on parents’ willingness to do the legwork required for new PCF classes to open.

Struggles over recruitment, negotiations with school boards, and difficult learning conditions for their children tested the resolve of parents, causing much fatigue and frustration. Initial enthusiasm for the PCF resulted in classes filling quickly in the first eleven districts to offer the program. But with decades of lobbying government

authorities behind them, parents devoted to implanting French-language education in their communities now found that one of the most immediate challenges they faced was often to convince others around them to join in the initiative. British Columbia's francophone community was by no means homogeneous. It was spread across the province with no significant francophone clusters like those that existed in other predominantly anglophone provinces.⁵⁰ French-speakers were concentrated primarily in the Vancouver and Victoria regions, where they had established social and cultural networks. Others made their homes elsewhere on Vancouver Island, in the Fraser Valley, and across the Interior and the North. Around Maillardville, some francophone families could trace their roots to successive waves of arrivals in 1909–10 and again in the 1930s, but in the postwar period, most francophones in the province were first-generation settlers hailing from other parts of Canada or Europe.⁵¹

Not all shared in the enthusiasm for minority-language schools. Although it was more feasible to gather a critical mass of a few families willing to make the effort in urban areas than in rural ones, most French-speaking parents remained uninterested in pursuing this avenue for their children's education. Given the PCF's novelty, some parents hesitated to get involved, fearing the program might lack staying power and be quickly discontinued. Classes were often comprised of students spanning three or four grade levels and many parents preferred to enrol their children in majority-language schools where they would attend classes with others their own age.⁵² Moreover, the lack of provisions for secondary school education prompted some to wonder whether their children would be ill prepared to pursue high school in English, whether the PCF would be as rigorous as the standard English-language curriculum, whether the level of French used in these schools would be adequate, and whether the experience and abilities of newly recruited teachers would be sufficient.⁵³ And in Maillardville, despite Ministry of Education suggestions that the Notre-Dame-de-Fatima parochial school adopt the PCF, it took until 1985 for the first Programme cadre class to be opened at Millside, an anglophone school located on the site at which the community's first French-language school had been opened seventy-five years earlier. That it took six years for the PCF to gain a foothold in Maillardville indicates that many parents in the community continued to privilege Catholic over French-language education.⁵⁴

Realizing the program would only survive if community buy-in was strong, parents' committees sought to convince fellow francophones of the program's worth. PFFCB president Héléne Godin later described her work as "a thankless task that requires considerable personal conviction."⁵⁵ Nonetheless, she called on parents to form local committees that were "strong, well informed, structured," and whose work would both improve the quality of the PCF and assert the community's right to minority-language education.⁵⁶ The PCF was "the opportunity of our lives," wrote Nanaimo parent Rosaire Tremblay, enjoining francophones in the city to mobilize for the opening of a class there. With rhetorical flourish, he called upon francophone families to act as the icebreakers that would push back the "English deep freeze that threatens to destroy us."⁵⁷ Whistler parent Claire Kingzett lobbied other francophone parents to set up the PCF, arranging for the school to recruit her own former teacher

from Port Alberni, Dominique Joyal. “We basically started a one-room school from scratch,” Joyal later recalled, adding that an active parents’ committee greatly facilitated the undertaking.⁵⁸ In Mission, parents combed the local phonebook and contacted all residents with French-sounding names, successfully recruiting new students, including several who attended the immersion program in Abbotsford.⁵⁹ Although research has suggested that parents of higher socioeconomic standing were more likely to enroll their children in francophone programs, it is evident that across British Columbia, as in other western Canadian provinces, personal conviction of the cultural value of linguistic and identity transmission was a key factor in parents’ decisions to embark on the path of minority-language education.⁶⁰

The PCF’s coexistence with immersion posed additional difficulties to francophone proponents insisting on a distinction between the two programs. “This is critical if assimilation is to be stopped,” argued Chilliwack parents to their school district.⁶¹ But parents denounced the lack of visibility afforded to the PCF relative to immersion,⁶² or the erroneous information sometimes given to families, resulting in their children being oriented towards immersion when they in fact would have qualified for the PCF.⁶³ Student *Éric Doucet*, for example, was enrolled in the English stream when staff at his Nanaimo school told his parents that since he was already fluent in French the PCF would not be valuable to him. By the time he reached high school, *Éric* felt his command of the language waning. Seeking French credit in view of university admission he wound up in immersion where he felt disadvantaged compared to his classmates who had studied the language for years. “If you think the immersion program is good for your child, well think again!” he said, in French, to the delegates of a provincial French-language education conference in Vancouver. “The young francophone’s level of French often diminishes as he assimilates into his environment and copies the faulty expressions of his peers,” *Éric* candidly added.⁶⁴

Despite these efforts, the PCF initially had difficulty differentiating itself from immersion. In Mission, for example, only the adoption of the charter allowed for the school district’s “strong opposition” to French-language programs to give way to the opening of PCF classes. But when an immersion program was also opened, PCF classes were gradually folded into it, eliminating the distinction. It would take local parents a decade of lobbying for a program geared exclusively to francophone children to be reopened.⁶⁵ Similarly, in places where (or in periods when) no immersion programs existed, anglophone children were routinely allowed into PCF classes. Up to 60 per cent of students were in fact anglophone during the program’s early years. Although this practice ensured strong enrolment favourable to the program’s continuity, the situation also led to tension with francophone parents who argued that ministry directives restricting access to the PCF should be more rigorously followed.⁶⁶ Some parents worried that since many of the children spoke no French when entering, the PCF was in effect a form of “immersion in disguise.”⁶⁷

That the program’s permanence depended on grassroots activism was further confirmed by the fact that school districts only opened PCF classes upon receiving a specific request from parents. Much therefore depended on the nature of the relationship parents could develop with local school district officials. In some cases, districts

were enthusiastic about the possibilities, for example, in Victoria where the principal of Uplands School was thanked for the “understanding and flexibility” with which he had implemented and grown the PCF,⁶⁸ or in Richmond, where the principal of Diefenbaker School made sure to ask anglophone students to welcome their new francophone schoolmates with a friendly “Bonjour!”⁶⁹

In other circumstances, however, parent committees were faced with either a lack of interest or even hostility among school and district officials. In Nanaimo, the PCF soon lost steam in the face of competition from French immersion and a lack of resources for bussing, a situation parents attributed to the school district’s “very harmful attitude,” which, they feared, would lead to the program being discontinued.⁷⁰ Indeed, the education ministry itself felt the need to specify differences between PCF and immersion, to “reduce the confusion in the minds of those who feel that those two programs have similar intent and are intended for similar groups.”⁷¹

These were recurring themes in committee reports throughout the PCF’s existence as communities across the province struggled to obtain teachers, busses, and adequate space in schools, or faced suggestions by some school trustees that it would “steal resources” from other programs.⁷² In Abbotsford, the PCF moved schools twice between April 1989 and January 1990, with a third move proposed, but ultimately halted, just three years later. “Bouncing a program around like this brings a great sense of instability and uncertainty amongst our parents, teachers and students,” pleaded parents’ committee president Claude Marchand, adding that some families had pulled their children out of the PCF and that the program had lost teachers as a result of “the hardship of these moves.” The challenges posed by the move, moreover, were inflected with linguistic tension. According to Marchand, “being French brings a certain amount of friction when introduced into a new school population.” Speaking to the broader difficulty francophones had in convincing a predominantly anglophone society of accepting the legitimacy of their claim to French-language education, Marchand pointed out that teachers and students alike faced exclusionary attitudes.⁷³ The earlier moves had been “truly demoralising,” noted another parent, denouncing the indifference and “even [a] callous attitude” on behalf of the school board, which she perceived as symptomatic of “the district’s attitude towards French-language programs,” one that would erode the PCF.⁷⁴

The suggestion of discrimination underlying relationships with some school boards reflects the broader political climate in which francophone parents saw the backlash against Quebec nationalism and official bilingualism as a further challenge to the implementation of minority-language programs in BC. In a province where premiers had vocally opposed official bilingualism and French-language schools, one of whom was known to mimic the sound of frogs when referring to prominent francophone politicians,⁷⁵ PCF proponents occasionally faced discrimination and intimidation. Letters to local newspapers described French-language education as “an effort to push French on Canada” or equated it with “full-blown apartheid” that would lead the country to “oblivion.”⁷⁶ Active in British Columbia, the Association for the Preservation of English in Canada (APEC) argued that French-language schooling was a threat to Canadian culture and would risk turning Canada into a unilingual

French country.⁷⁷ In Kelowna, for instance, APEC representatives led by local president Eugene Boiselle sought the removal of the bilingual sign on the school housing the PCF. “The francophone community feels isolated and very vulnerable in the face of this group of fanatics,” pleaded parent committee member Roselyne Henri, denouncing Boiselle as an “assimilated francophone committed to destroying all of the efforts that the parents of the PCF and Parents for French have put into the education of their children for 10 years in Kelowna and in the Okanagan Valley.”⁷⁸

At times, the children themselves experienced first-hand these linguistic tensions. In a poignant story, Carl Boislard-Lanois told of the difficulty he had fitting in at his new school in the Vancouver region after moving there from Quebec in 1986. To balance class sizes a number of immersion students had been moved into the PCF. Most of the children spoke English in class, and Carl himself was moved by the school into an English-language class on the grounds that he needed to learn the language. Children teased him for his accent and one student struck him in the stomach and face, telling him he should go to France, where he was “meant to live.” “That night, like many others, was hell,” he wrote, recalling his tears. On other occasions, his classmates had attempted to light his hair on fire as they made fun of his difficulty speaking English.⁷⁹

Despite these setbacks, interest in the PCF swelled in the province. In its first three years, enrolments grew from 213 to 972 students, a figure that would triple by the time the program was dismantled in 1995.⁸⁰ These numbers allowed for the opening of public stand-alone or homogeneous (to distinguish from immersion) French-language schools in larger centres and in which teaching, administration, and school life were to be conducted exclusively in French. The first, *École Anne-Hébert*, opened in Vancouver in 1983, followed by schools in Victoria in 1986, North Vancouver in 1987, and Chilliwack in 1989. In 1987, the Ministry of Education also extended the PCF to the secondary level on the condition that a minimum number of fifteen students registered.⁸¹ High school students typically had from one to four classes within the PCF, with the rest taken in the English or immersion programs.⁸² *École Victor-Brodeur* in Victoria was initially the only school in the province to offer a secondary PCF program in a stand-alone setting. It obtained a Ministry of Education grant allowing students from other regions to live with host families as they attended classes. Nathalie Hales, who relocated from the Lower Mainland, recalled the empty feeling of being left by her parents to attend school in an old building “of an ugly colour,” nervous at the thought of being billeted with the principal. Though the experience was ultimately a happy one, she called on the FPFCB to pursue more high school openings, noting that “a 16-year-old adolescent should not have to do what I had to do.”⁸³

Towards a Francophone School Board

Throughout the PCF’s existence, the single largest difficulty reported by parents was the lack of control they were able to exercise over the program. Existing “in the shadow of immersion programs,” and typically ensconced within anglophone schools

where francophone parents were in the minority on advisory committees, the PCF was seen as insufficient for upholding language rights and preventing assimilation: “our children were becoming unilingual anglophones, even as anglophones were becoming bilingual,” deplored the FPFBC.⁸⁴ For the parents, it was only by administering their own schools that “access, quality and equality” in matters of education could be ensured, along with the community’s “surviv[al] as one of the founding nations of Canada.”⁸⁵ After the hopes raised by the charter, some parents considered that minority-language education in British Columbia continued to be “synonymous with restriction and pettiness.”⁸⁶

For the FPFBC, only a full-fledged francophone educational system would allow adequate oversight and strengthen parents’, teachers’, and pupils’ confidence in their schools.⁸⁷ Seeking to press the provincial government into action, the FPFBC launched legal action in 1989.⁸⁸ Even as the suit was going ahead, the Supreme Court of Canada released its ruling in the case of *Mahé v. Alberta*. This decision upheld francophone parents’ right to their own school board where numbers warranted, thus setting an important benchmark for other francophone communities. In the wake of this decision, the FPFBC agreed to suspend its legal action while the provincial government set up a Minority Language Education Task Force.

Noting the rate of linguistic assimilation at over 70 per cent in BC, the highest of any province, the task force’s report highlighted the urgency of the community’s plea and called for a system that would “guarantee to francophones appropriate management and control of French education,” adding that stand-alone facilities were crucial to this endeavour.⁸⁹ While the FPFBC welcomed the task force recommendations, concrete action was slow to materialize.⁹⁰ As a result, the FPFBC resumed the suspended lawsuit,⁹¹ prompting the government to announce the creation of a Francophone Education Authority (the future CSF), whose jurisdiction would be limited to the province’s southwest, stretching from Chilliwack to Victoria.⁹²

For British Columbia’s francophone community, this represented an important victory in a decades-long battle for the legal recognition and public funding of French-language education in the province.⁹³ Expectations were high from the outset, and recognizing that its demands could not all be met at once, the FPFBC called on the community to support the board and commit to engaging in its construction.⁹⁴ Ultimately, though, the FPFBC maintained that this newly created structure did not go far enough in respecting section 23 of the charter, because it existed by regulation and was not mandated through legislation. Because government regulations can easily be overturned and the promised funding was discretionary, the new entity’s perennity was not guaranteed. Moreover, the regulation in question failed to mention the principle of equivalency in terms of funding francophone schools and did not guarantee support for the acquisition of property. The FPFBC agreed to work with families and the government to implement the new school authority but maintained pressure on the government by keeping its lawsuit active in the hopes of obtaining a more permanent arrangement.⁹⁵

Finally, in 1996, Justice David Vickers of the Supreme Court of British Columbia found in favour of the FPFBC, obliging the provincial government to formally

recognize the right of francophones to manage their own school board and to fund the construction and operation of schools.⁹⁶ But while the provincial legislature did amend the School Act to formally recognize the new school board, the FPFCEB argued that it continued to lack full control over its financial and human resources, remained unable to acquire property, and still had no conflict resolution mechanism for negotiating access to sites with anglophone boards. Another irritant was the fact that the CSF had jurisdiction over only a portion of the province so that francophone children living outside the areas covered continued to attend PCF classes run by English boards.⁹⁷ For the president of the Kelowna parents' committee this represented a "flagrant injustice," leaving francophone parents "at the mercy of administrators for whom PCF is not a priority."⁹⁸

The case again found itself before the Supreme Court of British Columbia. Although the government agreed to grant the CSF jurisdiction over the entire province it left untouched the issues of funding and property acquisition.⁹⁹ In a second ruling, Justice Vickers found that in leaving the CSF to deal directly with majority anglophone school boards, the province was lacking in its obligation to promote the linguistic and cultural rights of the minority, creating uncertainty about its future should school boards charge prohibitive rents or fail to renew leases. Vickers called for the implementation of a mechanism to resolve any disputes that might arise between the CSF and the anglophone boards with which it negotiated.¹⁰⁰ Mirroring gains made by francophone minorities in other provinces, British Columbia francophones had obtained much of what they had been fighting for. Members of the FPFCEB leadership expressed their weariness with the process and looked forward to moving on and focussing their energies entirely on helping the new CSF take flight.¹⁰¹

Rose-des-vents

A quarter-century into its existence, the CSF now oversees forty-three schools across the province, attended by some 6200 children.¹⁰² Yet as the past decade of legal actions indicates, its creation, though a response to community demands, did not put an end to BC francophones' struggle for minority-language education they consider equivalent to that experienced by the anglophone majority. The case of *École Rose-des-vents*, which featured prominently in the latest round of legal battles, perhaps best exemplifies the community's concerns and is worth briefly recounting since it illustrates the range of challenges noted by francophone families across the province.

Although *École Anne-Hébert*, the province's first stand-alone francophone public school, had represented a milestone, families residing on Vancouver's west side found its location inconvenient. Many preferred instead to send their children to local anglophone schools. Requests for a second PCF school in Vancouver began in the early 1990s, intensifying after the creation of the CSF.¹⁰³ When *École Rose-des-vents* opened in September 1997, parents once again noted the hard work and dedication that had been required for the project to materialize.¹⁰⁴ The school's name translates as "compass rose" (the circular image printed on a compass or map

showing the cardinal directions and 360 degrees of a circle), unwittingly foreshadowing the many moves it would endure. After a year in the wealthy Dunbar neighbourhood, the school moved south and east to the less privileged Marpole area.¹⁰⁵ Although the new location offered better conditions, parents were concerned that the lease was only for a two-year period.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, the following year the building was slated for demolition.¹⁰⁷ As the school year drew to a close, families remained in the dark about what September would bring.¹⁰⁸ With the Vancouver School Board (VSB) refusing to lease space, the parents' committee encouraged families to write to the premier, the education minister, and to VSB officials demanding that the situation be addressed.¹⁰⁹

The VSB announcement that Rose-des-vents would be housed within the anglophone Queen Elizabeth School, in the prestigious West Point Grey neighbourhood, was made without consulting that school's parents' advisory committee. Sparks flew when anglophone and francophone parents broached the issue at what one participant later described as a "hot meeting,"¹¹⁰ one that made front-page news in the *Vancouver Sun*. One Queen Elizabeth parent expressed fears that "this separatist pattern may indicate a tenacious domineering attitude in ethnic and day-to-day affairs." He also charged that many of the francophone students would come from "low-income families," and as such would "strain the school's resources."¹¹¹ Such "outrageous reaction of some QE parents voicing their prejudices and myths about francophone-Canadian citizens" had been "simply unbearable," responded the parents' committee, denouncing "an irrational attack on the French language and culture" that had nothing to do with school space. Statements like "we don't want your children in our school" or "you will damage our community" were considered "offensive and unnecessary,"¹¹² making some parents apprehensive about sending their children to Queen Elizabeth.¹¹³

The relationship was off to a rocky start. Parents noted that francophone classes were spread throughout the school, hampering the sense of cohesion, and that the program lacked a library and had limited access to the gymnasium.¹¹⁴ The question of Rose-des-vents's location the following year was once again posed, with parents taking their concerns directly to the premier and retaining legal counsel.¹¹⁵ The school finally obtained a permanent home in the Oakridge district of the city. No longer would they be the CSF's "itinerant school [...] never fully settled in, rarely welcome," optimistically noted relieved parents.¹¹⁶

However, it was during this period that the CSF began planning for the expansion of its secondary program, deciding to situate a new stand-alone francophone high school adjacent to Rose-des-vents. While news of the high school was cause for enthusiasm, Rose-des-vents parents once again grew concerned when they were told the plan would ultimately mean another move for the elementary school.¹¹⁷ When the new building opened, the daily sharing of hallways, washrooms, and a gymnasium between 320 elementary and 150 secondary students proved to be arduous, causing some parents again to prefer local anglophone schools.¹¹⁸ Moreover, the school's large catchment area meant that, according to an internal survey, 65 per cent of the students had to travel over half an hour by bus. In January 2009, at least eight families

identified the commute as the primary reason they had left the school.¹¹⁹ The conditions at Rose-des-vents had never ceased to cause headaches for its families, even after it had been opened for more than a decade.

Conclusion

The conditions and uncertainty at Rose-des-vents were characteristic of the way many British Columbians have perceived French-language education since the creation of the PCF. Although a site for a new francophone school on the west side of Vancouver was identified in 2018, financial terms are still being negotiated and a site for a third school to service francophones in the northeastern part of Vancouver continues as of 2020, causing parents to wonder whether the only way forward entails going back to the courts.¹²⁰ If the establishment of minority-language education in British Columbia was attributable to political developments and legal decisions on the national stage, its implementation and vitality in neighbourhoods across the province has depended on the commitment of families for whom such schools are synonymous with the perpetuation and flourishing of francophone language and culture on Canada's west coast. Francophones wanting an education system in their language knew that if the legislation and jurisprudence coming from Ottawa were to translate into a meaningful reality in their communities, it would require their energy and activism.

These parents, wrote the FPFCEB in a grant application, were "largely responsible for the existence and upholding of francophone schools in British Columbia."¹²¹ Activists set up committees, organized recruitment drives and information sessions, or travelled the province to meet local parent organizations and negotiate with bureaucrats and politicians. Countless others committed to sending their children to minority-language schools despite concerns over access to adequate space, classes comprising multiple levels, and long commutes. For many, exercising their right to French-language education in a minority context entailed a sense of sacrifice, from accepting these day-to-day inconveniences to the insecurity derived from not knowing whether their children's classes would still be offered the following year,¹²² from having their local establishment condescendingly referred to as "that school" by others in the community,¹²³ to the incredulity provoked by school district officials for whom French-language classes should be taught on Saturdays by volunteers in order to save taxpayers' money.¹²⁴ Evidently proud of the work that had gone into building first the PCF, then the CSF, some parents also found themselves feeling "tired and discouraged," or "disheartened" by these recurring challenges.¹²⁵ If the 2020 Supreme Court of Canada decision calling for significant new capital spending for francophone schools was celebrated as a culmination of decades of lobbying, francophone parents now await government action. In the meantime, the work of transforming court rulings into brick-and-mortar schools, seen as central to community building, will continue.

Notes

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- 1 *Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique v. British Columbia (Education)*, 2020 SCC 13; CSF press release, “Gain historique pour les Franco-Colombiens,” June 12, 2020.
- 2 Michael D. Behiels, *Canada's Francophone Minority Communities: Constitutional Renewal and the Winning of School Governance* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004).
- 3 Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones, <https://fnscf.ca>.
- 4 Renée Poutissou, “Chronique historique de l'éducation,” *Info-Parents*, June 2000, 8.
- 5 British Columbia Ministry of Education, Schools Department Circular 146, French Programs—Policy, April 1981.
- 6 Manoly R. Lupul, “Educational Crises in the New Dominion to 1917,” in *Canadian Education: A History*, ed. J. Donald Wilson, Robert M. Stamp, and Louis-Philippe Audet (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall, 1970), 266. Guarantees for denominational schools spelled out in the 1867 British North America Act were tested soon after Confederation as provincial governments created educational systems intended to foster Anglo-Protestant identity. Acrimonious crises erupted in New Brunswick, Manitoba, and the North-West as local administrations sought to curtail or prohibit Catholic education, often dispensed in French. By the beginning of the twentieth century, tensions crystallized explicitly around the question of language as Ontario's controversial Regulation 17 restricted French-language schooling to the first two years of the elementary curriculum. On these school crises, see also Louis-Philippe Audet, “Educational Development in French Canada after 1875,” in *Canadian Education*, 337–59; Michel Bock and François Charbonneau, *Le siècle du Règlement 17 : regards sur une crise scolaire et nationale* (Sudbury: Prise de parole, 2015); Marcel Martel and Martin Pâquet, *Speaking Up: A History of Language and Politics in Canada and Quebec*, trans. Patricia Dumas (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2012).
- 7 R. D. Gidney and W. P. J. Millar, “How to Teach English to Immigrant Children: Canadian Pedagogical Theory and Practice, 1910–1960,” *Historical Studies in Education/Revue d'histoire de l'éducation* 26, no. 2 (2014): 98. See also John C. Lehr and Yossi Katz, “Ethnicity, Institutions, and the Cultural Landscapes of the Canadian Prairie West,” *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 26, no. 2 (1994): 70–87.
- 8 Mary Ashworth, *The Forces Which Shaped Them: A History of the Education of Minority Group Children in British Columbia* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1979); Jean Barman and Mona Gleason, eds., *Children, Teachers and Schools in the History of British Columbia* (Calgary: Detselig, 2003), see especially Part 1; Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 347; F. Henry Johnson, “The Doukhobors of British Columbia: The History of a Sectarian Problem in Education,” *Queen's Quarterly* 70, no. 4 (1963–64): 528–41; Orest T. Martynowych, *Ukrainians in Canada: The Formative Period, 1891–1924* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 1991); Helen Raptis, “Dealing with Diversity: Multicultural Education in British Columbia, 1872–1971” (PhD diss., University of Victoria, 2001).

- 9 Commissioner Barry M. Sullivan expressed guarded support for recognition of multiculturalism in British Columbia schools in Province of British Columbia, *A Legacy for Learners: The Report of the Royal Commission on Education* (Victoria, BC: The Commission, 1988), 8. See also June Beynon and Kelleen Toohey, "Heritage Language Education in British Columbia: Policy and Programs," *Canadian Modern Language Review* 47, no. 4 (1991): 606–16.
- 10 John Edwards, *Multilingualism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 183. The tensions between bilingualism and multiculturalism are also examined in Stephen Carey, "Language Management, Official Bilingualism, and Multiculturalism in Canada," *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 17 (1997): 204–23.
- 11 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, "External Examiners' Report on Educational Policy in Canada" (Toronto: Canadian Association for Adult Education and the University of Toronto Student's Administrative Council, 1975), 10, n. 14.
- 12 Fédération des francophones hors Québec, *Les Héritiers de Lord Durham*, vol. 2, section Fédération des Franco-Colombiens (N.p.: Author, 1977), 41, 51.
- 13 On the distinctions between the programs, see Stephen Carey, "The Francophone School-Immersion School Debate in Western Canada," in *Contemporary Educational Issues: The Canadian Mosaic*, ed. Leonard L. Stewin and Stewart J. H. McCann, 207–14 (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1993).
- 14 Association des parents de l'école Rose-des-vents v. Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique, 2012 BCSC 1614.
- 15 Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique v. British Columbia (Education), 2016 BCSC 1764.
- 16 On the difficult conditions and tensions prevailing in rural schools during the first half of the twentieth century, see in particular Mona Gleason, "Families Without Schools: Rurality, Correspondence Education, and the Promise of Schooling in Interwar Western Canada," *History of Education Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (August 2017): 305–30; Helen Raptis, "Bringing Education to the Wilderness: Teachers and Schools in the Rural Communities of British Columbia, 1936–1945," *Historical Studies in Education/Revue d'histoire de l'éducation* 31, no. 1 (2019): 22–44; Paul J. Stortz and J. Donald Wilson, "Education on the Frontier: Schools, Teachers, and Community Influence in North-Central British Columbia," *Histoire sociale/Social History* 26, no. 52 (1993): 265–90; J. Donald Wilson and Paul J. Stortz, "'May the Lord Have Mercy on You': The Rural School Problem in British Columbia in the 1920s," *BC Studies*, no. 79 (1988): 24–58.
- 17 L'Association des parents de l'école Rose-des-vents v. British Columbia (Education), 2013 BCCA 407.
- 18 L'Association des parents de l'école Rose-des-vents v. British Columbia (Education), 2015 SCC 21.
- 19 CSF press release, "Victoire partielle du CSF et de la FPFCEB devant la Cour suprême de la Colombie-Britannique," September 26, 2016.
- 20 Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique v. British Columbia (Education), 2016 BCSC 1764, paras 5, 10.
- 21 Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique v. British Columbia (Education), 2018 BCCA 305.
- 22 During its existence, the newspaper was successively named *Le Soleil de Vancouver*, *Le Soleil de Colombie*, and *Le Soleil de Colombie-Britannique*. For the sake of consistency, I refer to it as *Le Soleil* throughout. Initially consulted in the archives of the Société historique francophone de la Colombie-Britannique, it has since been made available through the Simon Fraser University digitized newspapers collection.
- 23 These documents are uncatalogued and held in the offices of the FPFCEB. I cite them here by referring to "FPFCEB Archives."

- 24 Bruce McIntyre Watson, *Lives Lived West of the Divide: A Biographical Dictionary of Fur Traders Working West of the Rockies, 1793–1858*, vol. 1 (Kelowna: Centre for Social, Spatial, and Economic Justice, University of British Columbia, 2010), 65. On the early francophone presence in BC, see Jean Barman, *French Canadians, Furs, and Indigenous Women in the Making of the Pacific Northwest* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014); Robert Foxcurran, Michel Bouchard, and Sébastien Malette, *Songs upon the Rivers: The Buried History of the French-Speaking Canadiens and Métis from the Great Lakes and the Mississippi across to the Pacific* (Montréal: Baraka Books, 2016); John Ray Stewart, “French-Canadian Settlement in British Columbia” (MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 1956).
- 25 On these missionary activities, see Robert Choquette, *The Oblate Assault on Canada’s Northwest* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1995); Kay Cronin, *Cross in the Wilderness* (Toronto: Mission Press, 1960); Edith E. Down, *A Century of Service, 1858–1958: The Sisters of Saint Ann* (Victoria: Sisters of Saint Ann, 1999); Donat Levasseur, *Les Oblats de Marie Immaculée dans l’ouest et le nord du Canada, 1845–1967 : esquisse historique* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1995); David Mulhall, *Will to Power: The Missionary Career of Father Morice* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1986); Deborah Rink, *Spirited Women: A History of Catholic Sisters in British Columbia* (Vancouver: Sisters’ Association, Archdiocese of Vancouver/Harbour Publishing, 2000).
- 26 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (N.p.: Author, 2015).
- 27 References to this history can, for example, be found in Fédération des Franco-Colombiens, Brief to Eileen Dailly, minister of education, 1973, FPFCB Archives; Daniel Savas, “French Language Education in British Columbia: A Historical Overview,” 1989, unpublished report, 1994, FPFCB Archives; Ramine Adl, “French Presence and French Language Education in British Columbia: An Overview, 1793–1994,” unpublished report, 1994, FPFCB Archives; Association des parents francophones de la Colombie-Britannique, “L’école au cœur de la communauté,” 1995, FPFCB Archives, 1, 8–9.
- 28 Roger Rioux, “Dossier Éducation, No 2,” *Le Soleil*, July 16, 1976, 4. The first two schools to open in British Columbia were those of Anglican missionary Robert Staines (in English) and of Catholic missionary Honoré-Tomothée Lempfrit (in French). Both began classes at Fort Victoria in 1849. Barman, *French Canadians, Furs, and Indigenous Women*, 245; Down, *A Century of Service*, 24; F. Henry Johnson, *A History of Public Education in British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1964), 16–17; Patricia Meyer and Catou Lévesque, “Le Premier professeur francophone à Victoria,” *Le Chronographe* 3, no. 3 (1986): 9–10.
- 29 Jean Barman, “The Emergence of Educational Structures in Nineteenth-Century British Columbia,” in Barman and Gleason, *Children, Teachers and Schools in the History of British Columbia*, 24. Historian Sean Carleton qualifies Barman’s notion of consensus as being a “compromise” instead. See Sean Carleton, “Colonialism, Capitalism, and the Rise of State Schooling in British Columbia, 1849–1900” (PhD diss., Trent University, 2016), 50. See also Johnson, *A History of Public Education*, 39.
- 30 “Coquitlam to Take ‘Strikebound’ Pupils,” *Vancouver Sun*, April 3, 1951, 2.
- 31 On the Maillardville strike, see Victoria Cunningham, *Justice Achieved: The Political Struggle of Independent Schools in British Columbia* (Vancouver: Federation of Independent School Associations in British Columbia, 2002), 46–47; Paroisse Notre-Dame de Lourdes, “Programme-souvenir des fêtes du jubilé d’or” (Maillardville, BC: Author, 1959); Patricia E. Roy, “The Maillardville, BC School Strike: Archbishop W. M. Duke, Catholic Schools, and the British Columbia Election of 1952,” *Historical Studies* 80 (2014): 63–88. On the “exploding” school population of the postwar era, see

- Thomas Fleming, *The Principal's Office and Beyond: Public School Leadership in British Columbia*, vol. 1 (Calgary: Detselig, 2010), 331–32.
- 32 French-Canadian Federation of British Columbia, “By All Means: A Program of Action,” 1977, 36; Group Resources Consultant Services, *Maillardville French-Canadians* (Ottawa: Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, 1966), 99; Monique Layton, “An Outline of French Language Instruction Programmes in British Columbia,” unpublished report, 1977, 70.
- 33 William Bruneau, “Teaching and Learning French in the Vancouver Public Education System, 1886–1986,” *Le Chronographe* 3, no. 1–2 (1986): 22–24.
- 34 For the BC context, see Helen Raptis and Thomas Fleming, “From ‘La plume de ma tante’ to ‘Parlez-vous français?’ The Making of French Language Policy in British Columbia, 1945–1982,” *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy* no. 28 (2004): 1–9. For the Canadian context more broadly, see Matthew Hayday, *Bilingual Today, United Tomorrow: Official Languages in Education and Canadian Federalism* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2005).
- 35 Some clergymen insisted it was “better to go to heaven in English than to hell in French.” Group Resources Consultant Services, *Maillardville French-Canadians*; Catherine Lengyel and Dominic Watson, *La situation de la langue française en Colombie-Britannique* (Québec: Conseil de la langue française, 1983).
- 36 Thomas-M. Landry, “En Colombie-Britannique désormais école catholique ou école française,” 33e Congrès annuel de la Société canadienne d’Histoire de l’Église catholique, Université de Sherbrooke, June 11–12, 1966 ; Gérard Moreau, Fédération Canadienne-française de Colombie-Britannique, Rapport du président, Congrès 1966.
- 37 Lengyel and Watson, *La situation* (no page numbers).
- 38 Myriam Bennett, “Editorial,” *Le Soleil*, February 26, 1971, 2.
- 39 Roger Rioux, “Dossier Éducation, No 2,” *Le Soleil*, July 16, 1976, 4.
- 40 Marie Warzecha, “Pour le français à l’école,” *Le Soleil*, October 21, 1977, 2.
- 41 André Piolat, “Le français à l’école,” *Le Soleil*, January 30, 1970, 2. Born in Paris in 1912, Piolat’s family emigrated to Saskatchewan in 1920. After living in several Canadian provinces and travelling the world, Piolat settled in Vancouver in 1955. Single-handedly running *Le Soleil* for the first several years of its existence, he was recognized as a key leader of BC’s francophone community until his death in 1987. North Vancouver’s CSF school is named in his honour. See “Piolat, André,” in Gamila Morcos, *Dictionnaire des artistes et des auteurs francophones de l’Ouest canadien* (Sainte-Foy: Presses de l’Université Laval, 1998), 257–58.
- 42 “Oui à l’enseignement en français!” *Le Soleil*, August 19, 1977, 1.
- 43 Lengyel and Watson, *La situation* (no page numbers).
- 44 British Columbia Ministry of Education, “One Hundred and Seventh Annual Report, July 1, 1977 to June 30, 1978,” (1978), 18.
- 45 Association des parents francophones de la Colombie-Britannique, “Mémoire sur la culture francophone en Colombie-Britannique,” (1993), 4.
- 46 Lengyel and Watson, *La situation* (no page numbers).
- 47 British Columbia Ministry of Education, Schools Department Circular 146, French Programs—Policy, April 1981; Daniel Savas, “French Language Education in British Columbia,” Association des parents francophones de la Colombie-Britannique, 1989, 10, FPFCB Archives.
- 48 Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Part I of the Constitution Act, 1982, being Schedule B to the Canada Act 1982 (UK), 1982, c 11, s 23.
- 49 Rémi Léger and Nicholas Poulos, “Les hauts et les bas de l’action politique : luttes pour l’éducation en français en Colombie-Britannique,” *Minorités linguistiques et société* no. 10 (2018): 210–11.

- 50 The main exception to this rule remained Maillardville, though by the period covered here, suburban growth in the Vancouver region had largely swallowed up the francophone village while social and demographic pressures had led to an increased use of English in the community. Paul-Y. Villeneuve, "Maillardville: À l'Ouest rien de nouveau," in *Du continent perdu à l'archipel retrouvé: Le Québec et l'Amérique Française*, ed. Dean R. Louder and Eric Waddell (Sainte-Foy: Les presses de l'Université Laval, 2007), 131.
- 51 Fédération des francophones hors Québec, *Les Héritiers*, 2, section Fédération des Franco-Colombiens, 34–40.
- 52 Daniel Raunet, "Les Franco-Colombiens boudent l'éducation en langue française," *Le Devoir*, April 10, 1979; Daniel Raunet, "Les Franco-Colombiens boudent les programmes de français," *Le Devoir*, November 10, 1979. At the Annie B. Jamieson School in Vancouver, a class of fourteen was comprised of students in grades 4, 5, 6, and 7. Claude Tronel, "Une classe pas comme les autres...", *Le Soleil*, February 1, 1980, 6. Such large splits were a recurring concern throughout the PCF's existence, particularly in smaller communities.
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