

# Early childhood: Fostering the vitality of francophone minority communities <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

Full report PDF <sup>[2]</sup>

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Objectives

This report presents an overview of early childhood in Francophone communities in order to identify key issues and opportunities. It also contains recommendations addressed to the Government of Canada, given the federal government's commitment under Part VII of the Official Languages Act and the resulting obligations of federal institutions.

### 1.2. Methodology

#### 1.2.1. Literature review

This report is based on a review of related studies, data and documents from a variety of sources, such as early childhood experts, early childhood community organizations, Employment and Social Development Canada, the Department of Finance Canada, Canadian Heritage, Statistics Canada, the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages and the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages.

#### 1.2.2. Consultations

The Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages consulted key partners working in the field of early childhood, including the Commission nationale des parents francophones (CNPF) and the Groupe intersectoriel national en petite enfance (GRINPE).

A meeting was held in Toronto on February 10, 2016, in which the following organizations participated: the Association canadienne d'éducation de langue française; CNPF and the Francophone parents' federations or associations of British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland and Labrador; the Canadian Teachers' Federation; the Fédération canadienne des directions d'école francophone; the Fédération culturelle canadienne-française; the Fédération des associations de juristes d'expression française de common law; the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada; the Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones; the Ministerial Conference on the Canadian Francophonie; Pluri-elles (Coalition Bambin); the Réseau de développement économique et d'employabilité; the Réseau pour le développement de l'alphabétisme et des compétences; and the Société Santé en français.

The testimony gathered was used to supplement the analysis and corroborate the issues identified.

### 1.3. Scope

In this report, "early childhood" is used to designate the preschool-age period, the age group of which may vary: for example, 0 to 4 years old or 0 to 6 years old. It is a very broad concept that includes the parents' experience, the prenatal stage and the preschool period. Initiatives that support early childhood development may include various programs and services, capacity building, research and partnerships between various interested parties (governments, community groups, parents, etc.).

Because the issues surrounding early childhood development are very different in English-speaking minority communities, they are not addressed in this report. Although anglicization is as important in many English-speaking rural communities in Quebec as francization is among Francophones outside of Quebec, organizations representing Quebec's English-speaking communities say 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. The Office of the Commissioner is nonetheless continuing its discussions on early childhood development needs and concerns with representatives of Quebec's English-speaking communities.

It should be noted that a number of Francophone communities, particularly in New Brunswick and Ontario,<sup>5</sup> have access to bilingual or immersion services to make up for the lack of early childhood services in French. These services are often considered problematic for

Francophones because they tend to be offered in English-dominant settings. This can result in bilingual services being perceived as a form of assimilation for French-speaking children, and community groups agree that these services are not an ideal solution. Because of the differences between the issues surrounding services in French and those surrounding bilingual or immersion services, the latter are not included in this report.

**Region:** Quebec <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** community <sup>[4]</sup>

cultural competency <sup>[5]</sup>

francophone families <sup>[6]</sup>

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