



CPF NB: Higgs' government threatens province's official bilingualism

Move to abolish French language immersion will weaken Canada's only officially bilingual province

(Sussex, NB) Canadian Parents for French – New Brunswick (CPF NB) issued a stark warning over Premier Blaine Higgs' effort to abolish French immersion in Canada's only officially bilingual province.

"French immersion has been a success in New Brunswick," said Chris Collins, Executive Director of CPF NB. "The numbers speak for themselves, 93.2% of Grade 12 students in the French immersion program attained intermediate and above proficiency according to the Province's Department of Education report."

According to Collins, "Removing French immersion will have a long-term detrimental impact on the province. New Brunswick's long and proud history as an officially bilingual province is at risk under this government's plan."

According to the 2021 Census of Population, the bilingualism rate of young English-speaking New Brunswickers is on the rise. This group has the highest rate of bilingualism among English-speaking youth in the country outside of Quebec. In fact, 20% of English-speaking New Brunswickers under the age of 15 are bilingual, as are 32% of 15- to 24-year-olds.

In New Brunswick French was the first official language spoken by 30.0% of the population, while only 3.4% of Ontarians spoke French as their first language, according to Statistics Canada. Additionally, the study showed that bilingualism in the province remained fairly stable over this period (33.9% in 2016 and 34.0% in 2021).

In a recent statement issued by the Federal Commissioner of Official Languages Raymond Th  berge, he said, "I strongly encourage decision makers to focus on the interests and future of New Brunswick's youth, and to take full advantage of the education community's considerable expertise. Access to second-language learning is not just a provincial issue. Your leadership is essential, as the direction you choose for French immersion in New Brunswick will have an impact on bilingualism across the country."

Federal Minister of Official Languages Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor stated, "During negotiations, if we put money on the table, it is to make sure that there will be immersion programs in New Brunswick."

The decision to scrap French immersion is part of an ongoing effort by Higgs, who was a leadership candidate for the anti-bilingualism and now defunct Confederation of Regions (COR) party. The Premier recently lost his Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, Dominic Cardy, who disagreed with Higgs' position. In his resignation letter, Cardy said, "Change requires care, not a wrecking ball. Reform is about inspiring movement, not ordering people to move."

"The Higgs government's move is purely political," said Collins. "The Premier has been quoted as saying 'no one would make a change like that in an election year' and when shown his own Ministry's data on the success of French immersion he replied, 'data my ass'."

CPF NB is concerned that French immersion once again will become a political football. "The losers will be the youth of our province and the bilingual nature of New Brunswick," concluded Collins.

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About Canadian Parents for French New Brunswick (CPF NB):

Canadian Parents for French New Brunswick (CPF NB) is a provincial branch of the pan-Canadian organization, Canadian Parents for French. It is a national volunteer organization of adults

who recognize the value of learning French as a second language and actively promote opportunities for young Canadians to learn and use French. The organization's vision is a

Canada where French- and English-speakers live together in mutual respect with an understanding and appreciation of each other's language and culture and where linguistic duality forms an integral part of society.

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