

Development of Childhood Services in Alberta: Directions and Strategies for Francophones



FRANCOPHONE CHILDREN... A Treasure to discover, A Treasure to develop

Prepared by the Alberta Francophone Committee
for the National Children's Agenda



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Preamble

Nationally, the First Ministers recognize the importance of supporting families and communities. According to an agreement made in September 2000, 2.2 billion dollars of federal funds have been allocated within the framework of the National Children's Agenda for children's services for a period of five years commencing in 2001-2002. This agreement represents an opportunity for the consolidation and development of early childhood services for the country's Francophone communities.

The Francophone provincial partners in Alberta interested in advancing development strategies in this case have formed the Alberta Committee for the National Children's Agenda. This collaboration mirrors Senator Jean-Maurice Simard's definition of a vibrant and viable minority francophone community:

An ideal community benefits from an imposing critical mass great enough to act as a focal point and a system of integration for its members, while relaying a clear identity and pride strong enough to withstand the sudden fluctuations of the majority. It knows how to bring the majority to recognize its value while contributing to the shaping of its collective identity. It possesses the means of its own convictions to ensure its development, whether it be through organizational infrastructures or necessary resources¹. [Translation]

The committee organized province-wide consultations to identify the needs of the Francophone community. These results were then used to establish a strategic action plan to make

the needs of Francophones known and to further the development of early childhood services in French in Alberta.

In the National Children's Agenda agreement, it is difficult for Francophones to access federal funding from this agreement. The complex structure of the health and children's authorities in Alberta is not adapted to the needs and the reality of the Francophone population. It is imperative that the Francophone community receive the necessary funding to ensure its development. In fact, the signatories of the National Children's Agenda recognize the linguistic and cultural issues inherent to our various Canadian communities:

Early childhood development programs and services should include children living in different economical, cultural, linguistic and regional conditions². [Translation]

The action plan for official languages released in March 2003 as "The Next Act: New Momentum for Canada's Linguistic Duality", emphasizes the federal government's financial support of francophone minority communities over five years and for a total investment of 751.3 million dollars. The areas of education and community development

targeted in this plan encompass the priorities for the early childhood sector of the francophone communities in Alberta. As stated in the official document, this new federal money for children living in particular cultural and linguistic conditions follows the commitment of the federal-provincial-territorial agreement of 2000 to the development of early childhood services.



¹ Jean-Maurice Simard, Senator. *Le souci de la justice et de l'équité*. Posted on the Senate of Canada Website, November 1999, p. 65.

² Extract from the statement on early childhood development at the First Ministers meeting held on September 11th, 2000.

Introduction

Children represent the most precious resource of any society, the resource ensuring its sustainable vitality. Key actions for the healthy and dynamic evolution of any society are defending and advocating for the health, personal development and educational needs of its children.

The question of health remains pivotal when addressing the needs of children. An unhealthy child will face several obstacles during his development. A child's health depends not only on his parents and family, but also on the services and institutions in his community. Although the parents are the primary caregivers and educators of their child, they cannot carry the full responsibility of the health and development of their children alone.

Physical, emotional, intellectual and social levels all play an important role in the well-being of a child.

Francophone children grow up in a family environment in which French, one of the country's official languages, is lived and spoken. To reach their full potential these children and their parents must have access to services that respect and value their language and culture. The French language represents one of the elements defining the

Francophone child's sense of security and family environment. A community which provides all services in French enables the Francophone child to continue to live and grow in a positive and healthy way.

The National Children's Agenda provides Franco-Albertan families with the unequalled opportunity to develop the support and services in French in order to ensure the optimal global development of their children. Moreover, the contribution of this action plan to the official languages represents a considerable support to the development of the country's francophone communities.

Table 1

Population based on mother tongue 2001 Census	
<i>Total Population</i>	
Canada	29,639 035
⊕ Alberta	2 941 150
<i>French</i>	
Canada	6 703 325
⊕ Alberta	58 645
<i>French and English</i>	
Canada	112 575
⊕ Alberta	5 780
<i>French and non-official language</i>	
Canada	38 630
⊕ Alberta	1 090
<i>French, English and non-official language</i>	
Canada	10 085
⊕ Alberta	475
Source : Statistics Canada, Population Census. Last update: January 20 th , 2003.	

According to the 2001 census, there are **65 990 Francophones and French-speaking people** in Alberta as shown in the above table.



Vision

Franco-Albertan children and their families have access to services in French in all areas supporting their full development so they may actively contribute as citizens to the development of their community and society.

Values

PARTNERSHIPS

The strength and success of any community-based project depends on the collaboration between the family and the community and the complementary efforts. The key to success of any community-based intervention is dependant on the community supporting the role of the parent.

RESPECT

Every society has a responsibility to respect each individual child and value their uniqueness – their language and culture. In September 2000, all Premiers unanimously agreed that “every child should be respected and have the opportunity to exploit his own physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual and creative abilities.”

DIVERSITY

Canada is a bilingual and multicultural country, a country that values cultural heritage and diversity. Early childhood services must be sensitive to this diversity, thereby acknowledging and appreciating the uniqueness of each child.

SELF-IMAGE

Each child must develop a positive self-image to ensure a healthy development. Within the family unit and through their French language, Franco-Albertan children achieve this. In addition community service plans must support children’s language, culture and identity.

INNOVATION

The quest for new ways and means to meet the range of children’s legitimate needs must be on-going.

PRO-ACTION

Efficient community-based services depends on the ability and will to anticipate demand, whether or not this demand is made explicit by the community.

COMMITMENT

All those working in the area of early childhood services must be fully committed to providing children with the best possible conditions to develop to their full potential.

SENSITIVITY

Community-based services and child service providers must be sensitive to the needs, values, language and culture of the children and families they serve.



Franco Albertan Context

The major challenge for a Francophone community in a minority situation is ensuring the vitality and the development of its members. The struggle against assimilation requires the commitment of all generations and social classes across the entire Francophone community. Education, in its largest sense, remains a necessary and critical means in this on-going struggle. Preschool education represents not only the first step in lifelong learning³, but also an essential element for the survival and development of French education in a minority environment.

Quality French preschool services directly address the impact of assimilation of the next generation of Francophone children in this province. These services allow the children to develop their abilities in French at a decisional moment in their life. *Francisation* programs, for example, not only develop language skills but also a sense of culture and identity, thereby fostering a sense of belonging to the community⁴. With an increasingly multiethnic population, the francophone identity continues to be redefined. Our community embraces these differences and is enriched by its diversity.

The majority of couples in the Francophone community of Alberta are exogamous (linguistic and cultural intermarriage). English is often used in the home, and fostering a social and cultural

Table 2

Number of Francophones per family unit and French as the language spoken in the home, by province and territory (except Quebec), 0-4 years of age inclusive - 1996						
Extracted from Angéline Martel's study entitled « <i>Langue, familles et droits éducatifs</i> » (1999)						
Province or territory	2 parents FLM		1 parent FLM		Single-parent family FLM	
	A.D.	A.D.F.L.U. (%)	A.D.	A.D.F.L.U. (%)	A.D.	A.D.F.L.U. (%)
British Columbia	695	540 (78)	4 240	580 (14)	605	50 (8)
Alberta	990	670 (68)	5 515	615 (11)	335	50 (15)
Saskatchewan	315	210 (67)	1 480	85 (6)	160	25 (16)
Manitoba	1 125	890 (79)	3 415	535 (6)	255	75 (30)
Ontario	12 935	11 520 (89)	29 795	6 515 (22)	4 540	2 300 (51)
New Brunswick	8 550	8 395 (98)	4 695	1 745 (38)	1 620	1 380 (85)
Nova Scotia	880	755 (86)	2 195	300 (14)	140	40 (29)
P.E.I.	130	110 (85)	425	45 (11)	50	10 (20)
Newfoundland	45	40 (89)	180	25 (14)	0	0 (0)
NWT	30	25 (83)	195	35 (18)	15	0 (0)
Yukon	35	30 (86)	90	40 (45)	10	0 (0)
TOTAL	25 730	23 185 (90,1)	52 225	10 530 (20,6)	7 730	3 940 (51)
FLM : Français langue maternelle (French as mother tongue) A.D. : ayants droit (Francophone as defined in Section 23 of the Canadian Human Charter of rights) A.D. F. L.U. : ayants droit de français langue (usage) parlée le plus souvent à la maison (Francophone as defined in Section 23 with French as the language most spoken at home) [Translation]						

³ Sectorial plan 5 of the "Projet éducatif pancanadien". June 1999, p. 12.

⁴ Status of Women Canada. *La garde des enfants*. Group Study Report. Ottawa, 1980, p. 99-100.

life in French is an everyday challenge. In this context, preschool children do not have many opportunities to develop their French linguistic skills⁵, and parents are prone to choosing an English or French immersion school rather than opting for a Francophone education. Our community is compelled to guide and support these parents so they may make informed decisions for their child.

Family Support and Parent Education

The roles and responsibilities of a parent are experienced in many different contexts: at home, in the preschool setting and within the greater community to name but a few. In order to facilitate and maximize parental commitment to preschool education, we must first raise their awareness of the central role it plays in their child's development.

Families must have access to cultural, educational and health resources in order to fully assist in the development of their children. Family members must have an awareness of the use and incorporation of these resources. Supporting, educating and informing are requisite on an ongoing basis as there is a continuous influx of new parents, especially at the preschool level. The education of the non-Francophone parent of interlinguistic marriages must also be included to compliment the support offered to Francophone families.

Table 2, extracted from Angéline Martel's study entitled "*Langue, familles et droits éducatifs. Les ayants droit francophones selon l'article 23 de la Charte canadienne des droits et libertés (1999)*", clearly demonstrates the relationship between the transmission of the French language and the number of interlinguistic marriages in each province.

Family support programs consider parenting a lifelong learning process and work to empower individuals, families and communities. As well, they provide increased opportunities which collectively encourage growth and development⁶. The impact of Francophone family resource centres in the province is greatedened because they are tangible results of grass-root initiatives to meet local needs. There is a diversity of services within the present network of resource centres ranging from resource-lending (books, tapes, videos, toys, etc.) that support services in literacy (Story Hour) or basic literacy programs (Ready to Read). Through provincial partnerships, other programs such as "*Francophones aux couches*" (home visits) and "*La famille de l'an 2000*" (interactive virtual workshops) increase the range of family support available to families. The Francophone family resource centre represents the natural focus point in a community from which existing services can be expanded and new services developed.

Existing Services for Children in the Francophone Community

Throughout the years Francophones have created the necessary infrastructures and networks to ensure access to a minimum of essential services key to ongoing development and growth. The Francophone community as a whole is represented by a legislatively recognized association, the *Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta*. Five Francophone educational regional authorities have formed their own provincial federation.

Three years ago this same federation of Francophone school boards created a regional consortia for the assessment and evaluation of special need students. As well, the Francophone community boasts a provincial family institute with a network of eighteen resource centres throughout Alberta, a Francophone parent federation serving twenty-one preschools, eighteen playgroups, two day care centres as well as before-and-after school day care services.

⁵ It has been demonstrated in particular, that with Francophone minorities in Canada, four out of five mixed marriages with an Anglophone spouse result in the linguistic assimilation of children, no matter the sex of the Anglophone spouse. An immediate consequence of this, is that as early as kindergarten we find a linguistically heterogeneous group of students in relation to native language competency. Extract from Raymond Théberge, November 1990, p. 16.

⁶ Refers to two guidelines with respect to family support from FRP Canada, a national association incorporated under the name Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs.

Recently, the government of Alberta formed the Francophone Secretariat to facilitate and support the efforts of the Francophone population in meeting their needs.

Together these stakeholders provide a wide variety of services, family support programs and educational programs for children from birth to five years of age.

RESOURCE CENTRES

- ⊖ Library services for the borrowing of educational, health and leisure materials for both families and their preschool children
- ⊖ A meeting place for welcoming new families as well as a safe place for sharing, learning and networking
- ⊖ Onsite need-based family support programs
- ⊖ Programs for children
- ⊖ Resource centres are located in Francophone schools, school-based community centres or housed independently.
- ⊖ The resource centres are associated under the umbrella of a provincial family Institute.

PLAYGROUPS

- ⊖ Offer free play and socialization opportunities for children aged 0 to 5 years
- ⊖ Offer socialization and networking opportunities for parents
- ⊖ Organized and financed by parents

DAY CARES

- ⊖ Generally for children from 18 months to 6 years of age
- ⊖ Day cares can be:
 - ⊖ non-profit organizations
 - ⊖ independently operated day homes or in a home setting
- ⊖ Before-and-after school care for children over 5 years old

PRESCHOOLS

- ⊖ Geared for children aged 3 to 4 years old
- ⊖ Programs from 2 to 5 half-days per week
- ⊖ Learning through play
- ⊖ Preschools can be:
 - ⊖ non-profit organizations
 - ⊖ supported by a school board
- ⊖ Offer *francisation* programs
- ⊖ Preschools are located in Francophone schools, school-based community centres or housed independently.

SPECIALIZED SERVICES

- ⊖ Access to resource people and to early detection and intervention programs through Francophone school boards.

Fundamental

Principles

- ⊖ The parent is the first educator of the child and is legally responsible for him until the age of majority.
- ⊖ The role of the parent in early childhood education and *francisation* is critical. The parent's commitment can be demonstrated in the home as well through the use of preschool services in French.
- ⊖ In a minority context where Francophone education targets both linguistic continuity and cultural growth, preschool services are essential and its implementation becomes the responsibility of the community as a whole.

This illustrates but one of the positive outcomes of the partnership among home, school, and community. As the school develops its relationships with families and community, partnerships rise to create the educational, community and cultural spaces needed⁷.

The Francophone minority must have access to services in French equivalent to those available to the majority.

Constitutional recourse was defined by the Supreme Court of Canada judgments and interpretations of Sections 23 and 24 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Restitution for past inequities is imperative in order to provide individuals and communities of the linguistic minority with the means to ensure a future.

⁷ Plan sectoriel 4 du Projet éducatif pancanadien. June 1999, p. 9.

Obviously, provincial support is essential. There are two aspects to recourse: systemic failure whereby the existing system does not meet the needs of the minority (for example, French immersion schools), and insufficiencies which require additional resources (for example, *francisation* funding).

- ⊖ Access to preschool services help build an environment conducive to positive

development, maintenance and growth of the Francophone identity. These services play an integral role in recourse as they aim to prevent assimilation and counter the linguistic shift.

- ⊖ The Government of Alberta has shown its support for initiatives in early childhood as in The Alberta Children and Youth Initiative (ACYI), one of the Government's cross-ministry priority policy initiatives for 2002-2003⁸.

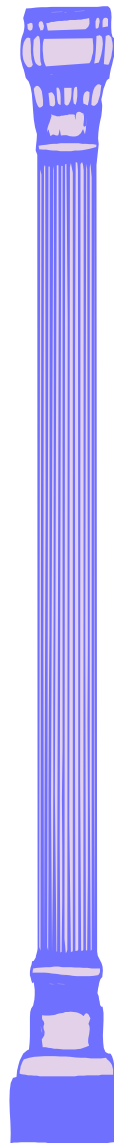
Action

Funding granted to provinces through the National Children's Agenda presents a unique opportunity for government bodies and Francophone organizations to create partnerships to develop early childhood services for Francophone children in Alberta.

Current access to early childhood services for Francophones living in Alberta is not equitable to that of the majority in terms of accessibility. Sparsity and distance are issues that create a disparity of services offered in French from one region to the other. The means by which Francophones acquire equivalent services will be different than those of the majority. Issues such as lost time and recourse must also be addressed.

Francophone partners committed to the development of early childhood in Alberta firmly believe in the importance of comprehensive support and in the creation of an environment that fosters a child's full developmental potential. The Alberta Committee for the National Children's Agenda based their strategic plan on the following statement:

Learning begins at birth and lasts a lifetime. Educational leaders in schools must, consequently, ensure that a wide spectrum of community-based support in the area of preschool education is being offered to families with young children.



Preschool programs have proven to have a long-term effect that benefits individuals and society. When learning and development take place in optimal conditions from birth to age 6, there is less failure in the school system and fewer costs to society⁹. [Translation]

The best solution for the development of and accessibility to early childhood services remains the strengthening of the existing infrastructures in our community. Such an investment will bring greater equity in the area of support services for our families and provide a better start in life to our children.

In order to reinforce the existing structures and ensure the long-term viability and development of new early childhood services in French, the Francophone community of Alberta requires adequate funding which would allow the realization of eight objectives of an action plan.

Adequate and accessible sites for resource centres in order to offer families a broader range of services and programs.

Currently, resource centres offer resource-lending services (books, tapes, CDs, toys, etc.). Services available in these centres are limited due to insufficient space. Larger premises would permit expansion of services.

⁸ Website <http://www.child.gov.ab.ca/>

⁹ *Préparation à l'apprentissage : l'éducation préscolaire*. Document prepared by the Canadian School Boards' Association for the Third National Forum on Education of the CMEC, page 2 (St-John's, Newfoundland: May 28-30, 1998)

Adequate sites for preschool, day care, and playgroup services.

Most preschools are located in schools through the support of the Francophone school boards able to do so. However, many of these premises remain inadequate in meeting early childhood needs. In the case of day care centres, sites must comply with Alberta Children's Services strict standards. The organization of a playgroup service, on the other hand, is relatively simple as there are no formal requirements in regards to space.

Fair compensation for qualified human resources in early childhood services.

The continuity and development of early childhood services depend greatly on the quality of human resources and their ability to offer services. At this time it is impossible to offer an equitable salary for the required expertise. The majority of early childhood services rely on volunteer manpower. The high rate of turn-over of volunteers greatly affects the stability and continuity of programs and services available.

The creation of satellite or principal resource centres in regions where this service does not exist.

The establishment of preschool, day care, and playgroup services in regions where these services do not exist.

The Francophone community is in full expansion with new Francophone schools opening across the province. It is important to offer the entire range of complementary services in these new regions to further the development of Francophone children throughout the province.

Increased visibility and recruitment through a promotional campaign for early childhood services available in French.

It is important to inform the population of the services offered in order to foster the demand for French services.

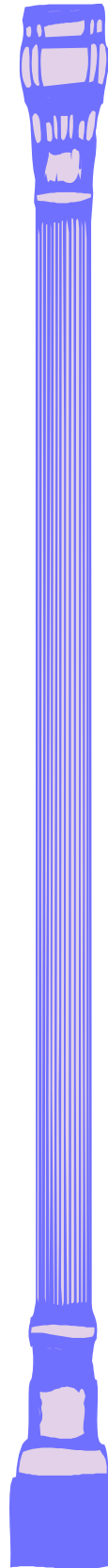
Early childhood education for parents and early childhood stakeholders.

Provincial round table results clearly demonstrate the need for training and resource materials for both stakeholders and parents.

Coordination of the province-wide development of early childhood services and programs.

The Alberta Francophone Committee for the National Children's Agenda recognizes that provincial coordination is essential to the implementation of the strategic action plan.

Financial support will allow The Alberta Francophone Committee for the National Children's Agenda the means to carry out these actions for the overall well-being of Francophone children in Alberta. Realizing these objectives will not only ensure the vitality of the Franco-Albertan community today and in the future but will allow children to thoroughly contribute as citizens to the richness of our province, our country and the world.





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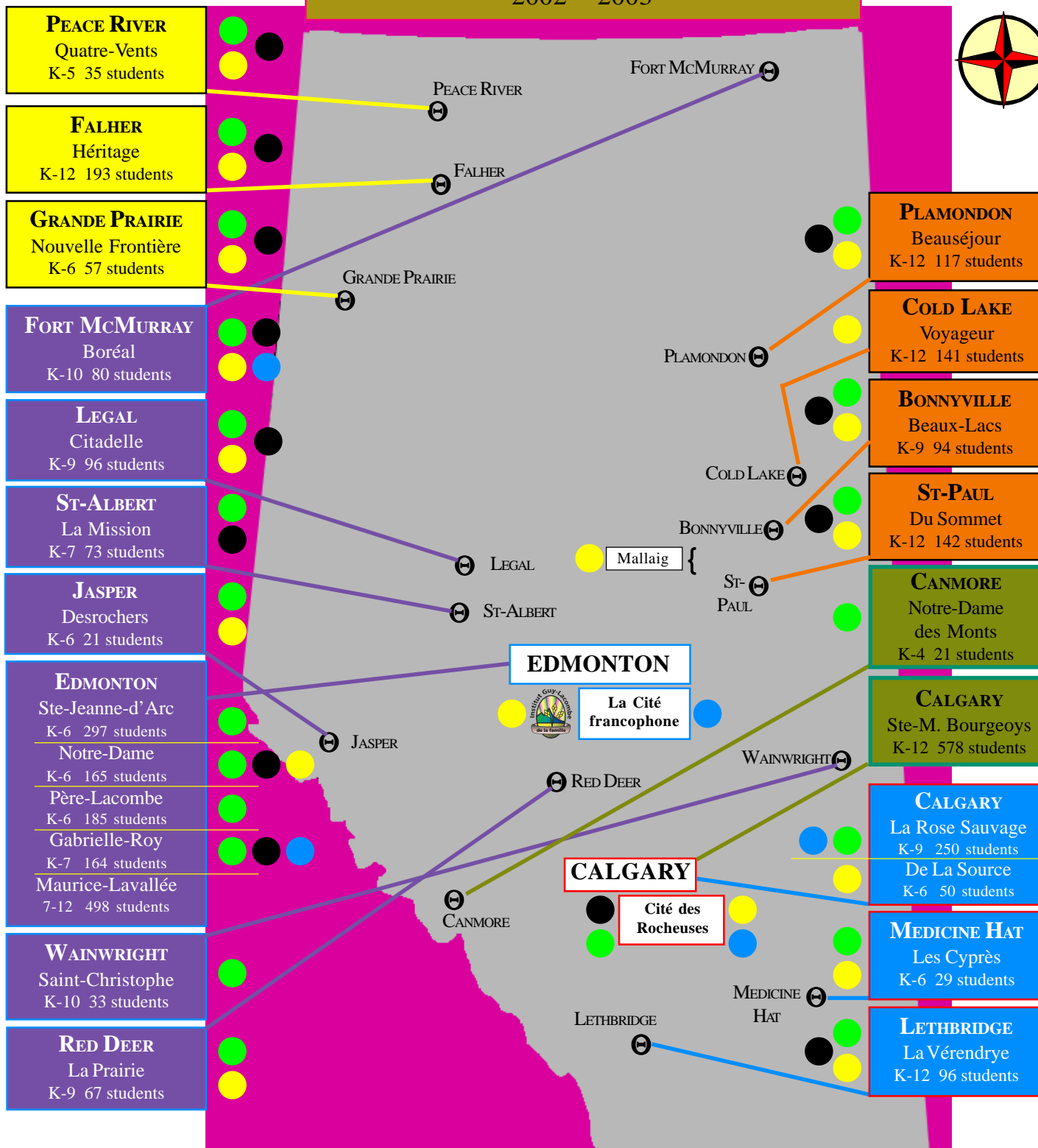
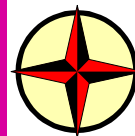
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CHILDHOOD SERVICES in context of Francophone Schools and School Boards in Alberta 2002 - 2003



Northwest Francophone Education

Greater North Central Francophone Education

Greater Southern Separate Catholic Francophone Education

East Central Francophone Education

Greater Southern Public Francophone Education

● Resource Centre 0 - 6 yrs (family)
 ● Play Group 0-5 yrs
 ● Preschool
 ● Day care - 5 yrs +
 ● Day care - Multiple age groups